TIBETAN SKY LINES

by

ROBERT B. EKVALL

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To THE MEMORY *of my many Tibetan friends who have crossed the sky line for the last time*

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Foreword

The forbidden land of Tibet has always had a peculiar fascination for the Western world, and never more than now as it slowly and unwillingly comes to terms with the overwhelming force of Red China. To the geographical barriers of a two-mile high plateau, guarded by towering mountains, is now being added the familiar "iron curtain" which will seal Tibet off from the West even more effectively. From the accounts of travelers and scholars we know a fair amount about the ways of life of Tibet but we know relatively little about how Tibetans think and feel. It is the great virtue of the present volume of profiles and incidents of Tibetan life that it fills this gap—it shows us Tibetans as human beings in all their moods and passions. And with this "window" into Tibetan life we can begin to understand why China has never achieved any real control over Tibet in the past, and can see some of the difficulties which Red Chinese administrators will face in the future.

The author, Robert B. Ekvall, is a missionary by occupation and an anthropologist by natural interests and training. He describes in his Introduction the circumstances which led to his residence, with his wife and son, among the Samtsa nomads of northeastern Tibet; he does not tell us the unusual preparation he brought to this venture. He was born on the Kansu-Tibetan border, of missionary parents,

and grew up speaking Chinese and, later, Tibetan. After schooling he worked as a missionary among Chinese, Moslems and Tibetans in this region; during an interlude in the United States, where he took advanced training in anthropology at the University of Chicago, he wrote *Cultural Relations on the Kansu-Tibetan Border* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1939), an important and pioneer account of cultural interchange among these groups. After temporary internment by the Japanese in Indo-China at the beginning of the war, Mr. Ekvall joined the U. S. Army as an expert on Far Eastern affairs and has continued to make his special knowledge available to the Government. A year ago he was planning to return to India and Tibet. When he left, in 1935, the Communist armies of Chu Teh and Mao Tzse Tung were being successfully fended off by the Tibetans in their flight to Yenan; in 1951 their entrance could not be denied. These circumstances have led to further researches on Tibetan life and culture, and to the present volume.

In the following tales you will become acquainted with a series of remarkable Tibetans: Duggur, Stretch Ears Jamtsen, Slab Face Rinchen, Handsome Fortune Temchok and many others. You will also learn a great deal about Tibetan life and its basic values. The account of how the priests of the Sechu lamasery at Lhamo were persuaded to allow a missionary family to settle among them is a story in itself. Other outstanding incidents are Duggur's troubles with his two wives, and the powers of silence; the wide-reaching consequences of befriending a female pilgrim with three previous

husbands; the rituals and revelry at the ceremonies in honor of the Butter Images; the peace delegation to the invading Chinese army; the causes and arbitration of feuds; and the assemblage of the pilgrims for Lhasa.

Northeastern Tibet has been less affected by external influences than has Lhasa and the regions to the south. Here Tibetans are divided between pastoral nomads and sedentary agriculturists—"people of the black tents" and "people of the earthen houses." This division cuts across tribal and clan lines, and for each group the nomadic way of life is felt to be superior. The values of this nomadic life—and its difficulties and hardships—are here portrayed in exemplary fashion. In this harsh environment many strange Tibetan customs acquire significance and meaning. You will be surprised at the amount of insight into Tibetan life you will find in these pages. But most important, you will discover real people getting into and out of difficulties—and described with a warm and sympathetic eye.

Fred Eggan

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Introduction

The object of this book is not to tell the story of a missionary family, adventuring, as missionaries do, to where there is work to be done. Nor is it to describe the mission, to state anew its challenge and rewards. It is no part of its purpose to show myself and my family in bold relief against the Tibetan scene. Rather, we and all the life we lived there should serve only as a window through which the reader may see our Tibetan friends and the people of that land.

In the summer of 1929 I, missionary on horseback and known throughout this book as Sherab Dzondri, came to the country of the Samtsa nomads and asked for permission to live at Taktsang Lhamo. With me were my wife, Betty Fischer Ekvall, gentle, well-loved and known to the Tibetans as Dorje Mtsǫ, and our four-year-old son—child becoming boy sooner than most—whose Tibetan name was Da-whay. Taktsang Lhamo is a lamasery center composed of the lamaseries of Gurdu and Sechu, together with the two trading posts, one attached to each lamasery, and a number of hamlets in the immediate vicinity. It is an important gathering place for all the tribes of the region, and is well up near the twelve-thousand-foot level of Tibetan grass country, about one hundred miles from the Chinese border.

It was only after rebuffs and many delays that permission was granted to the "foreigners" to live in Taktsang Lhamo, and finally in the fall of 1930 my wife, my son and I moved into temporary quarters in one of the trading posts. The next

five years were spent in the region, with Taktsang Lhamo as our base. Then our Tibetan residence was interrupted by a stay of four years in the United States, but we returned to Lhamo in 1939.

I left again in the summer of 1941. Somber events had brought about the closing of the station. The missionary family broke up, and the war and its aftermath swept everything into a cataclysmic pattern of change. Those changes—not only those which affect all of Asia but personal ones as well—have written "No return as yet," to the question my Tibetan friends still ask: When is Sherab Dzondri coming back?

The land itself is like no other, and of all the sky lines, a Tibetan sky has a significance quite its own. Beyond that meeting place of earth and sky—sometimes lined by the pale shadows of drifted snow but during summer fringed with tall grasses hung with splashes of color where the wild poppies dance—beyond that meeting place is the unknown land from which surprises come. A hairlike rift in the blue may mean a lance, and the fork of a gun rest—which can be mistaken for a buck gazelle carrying his horns proudly on the brow of the hill—may mean enemies and a raid. The bold outline of a distant mounted figure is sure to bring a sense of uncertainty, even menace. Because of these things the dwellers of the black tents, and such of the farming clans as travel in the steppe country, approach that sky line circumspectly, peering cautiously beyond before they exchange old horizons for new.

Introduction

From the sky line upward, a wavering band may show where a camp fire flares, or a thicker burst of smoke may mark the burning of sacrifices and juniper boughs where prayers are being said to the mountain gods. Cattle and caravans crawl on the distant edge, though the black tents themselves hardly rise above the long grasses. Along that narrow zone where meet untamed earth and fickle sky—often shrouded with rain or lashed by hail—all of Tibetan life moves in silhouette, and there go my friends: Stretch Ears Jamtzen, Duggur, Slab Face Rinchen, and the others. Some have gone to the last sky line where the quiver shrines of the mountain gods and the flapping prayer flags are landing beacons for the vultures, dropping from above to bring the "burial of the sky." But most of these friends still go about their affairs under the uncertain Tibetan heavens. The land is wild and the life is exceedingly strange, yet to me those who so go are not strange. And this book is written that they may be less strange to all who read—brought from Tibetan sky lines to you.

I should perhaps caution the reader that I have permitted my memory to range freely over my Tibetan years, and those portraits and incidents that follow obey no law of time. Some are from our earliest days there, and others are from near the close. Each incident is, I hope, self-contained, and the chapters follow no strict time sequence, but rather obey the unpredictable movements of the heart and mind.

ROBERT B. EKVALL

TIBETAN SKY LINES

1

Permission Granted

The tiny flame of the candle flared and leaped as the night wind fumbled and pushed at the tent flaps. Supper was nearly ended, and with the last helping of noodles and meat from the kettle we all moved a bit closer around the little bucket of *zho*. The outside of the bucket was smeared with butterfat and long yak hairs fringed the brim; but within, the thick curds, clean and white, promised mouthfuls of that creamy Tibetan desert, zho, which is made by adding a yeastlike ferment to yak milk, after which it sets like junket and has a fruit-acid flavor.

There were five of us who set our bowls down for helpings of the last course, after having first carefully licked the bowls clean of all traces of the first. There were Abba Dzopa Duggursjap, man of position and means among the Samtsa nomads of northeast Tibet, and Troroma, the younger of Duggur's two wives. Dorje Mtso (white lady, and my own wife), played hostess to our Tibetan friends and helped our

four-year-old son, Da-whay, eat his food. The fifth person was myself, Sherab Dzondri, missionary seeking entrance into Tibetan country where passports meant nothing and where no centralized authority existed. Dorje Mtso had served the first course from out the camp kettle set none too securely on a bed of coals in a makeshift braisier, a wash-basin filled with sand. Now Troroma, Duggur's wife, broke the creamy top of the zho with her wooden ladle and filled my bowl, putting down the ladle to present it to me with both hands, the use of both hands making it a polite offering. Then she filled Dorje's Mtso's bowl, Da-whay's, Duggur's and her own. Dorje Mtso opened a little tin box and sifted white sugar into the bowls, whereupon old Duggur stirred his zho with a stubby finger, paused to suck it with intense satisfaction, one tooth showing his pleasure.

"How tasty it is with 'tastiness' in it!" Duggur began. "And this white tastiness is the best I have ever eaten. How nice it is to be all just as members of a family! *My* meat and *your* noodles; Troroma's zho and Dorje Mtso's tastiness, fine and white to put on the top. Ayah, just right! But I didn't come to eat, Sherab Dzondri. I came to tell you that tomorrow twenty or more men of the tribe ride to Taktsang Lhamo and we too can go. At least two of your horses are over the mange, are they not? Dorje Mtso and Da-whay can stay here with the tents. The moon is bright and no one need be afraid." Again Duggur's finger stirred vigorously and he smacked his lips.

For fifty days we had stayed at Duggur's encampment,

unable to go on. First it had been that the Jangtsa were in the saddle and the trail unsafe. Then Rzakdumba were known to be riding. The limestone peaks that rise above the rounded contours of grass country mark the twin lamaseries of Gurdu and Sechu which comprise the trade and lamasery center of Taktsang Lhamo, Goddess of the Tiger's Den. They are as remote as any place beyond the sky line of a forbidden land, and Duggur, as our host, felt it inadvisable for us to go on when he was not sure about the trail. We could do nothing but stay in the encampment and gaze longingly every day at the limestone peaks; the signpost of our goal. Then the tribe moved, and we perforce moved with them, until the peaks dropped behind other mountains rising on the sky line. Finally, our horses caught the mange. They were treated with a decoction made from roots and herbs that literally dehided them, and their skin hung in tatters for days, and riding was out of the question.

All during this enforced delay we lived side by side with Duggur in adjoining tents. It was the closest of associations. We ate together, except when he caught us frying eggs, at which his Tibetan fastidiousness rebelled, and rode together over the Tibetan steppe spread with the flower-strewn beauty of early summer. One day I watched the sheep with him and we huddled under the same raincoat as gusts of hail swept over the hilltop where we sat. And once we went after blue sheep: Duggur—sixty and fat—riding a horse over slides of scree, I on foot; Duggur waiting while I climbed the cliffs. And we had lunch together by a little mountain-

top spring. The steppe and mountains with distant snow-covered landmarks—Amni Machen, Nyinbir Yirtze, and others—stretched from horizon to horizon outlined against the blue of a cloudless sky.

Sometimes we would sit together in the lee of his tent and just talk, while Troroma sewed a pair of Tibetan boots she was making for me, and poured tea. Duggur's questions would lead the way to a discussion of everything from this life to the hereafter, ending up always with the matter of rain: what made it rain and how, and why the rainbow stretched across the sky. For the rainbow there was a reason behind a reason, the white man told his Tibetan friend. Sometimes members of the tribe would come and we would sew up sword wounds, and wash and tend the horrible burns Tibetan children get when they roll by accident into the hot ashes of the tent fire. On such occasions Duggur beamed with pride, happy that the strange foreigners, against whom tribal opinion had been strong, were proving an asset rather than a liability.

But the fifty days were over. Tomorrow I would ride to Taktsang Lhamo where the lamasery of Gurdu—the largest of the two lamaseries which comprise this center—had once given me a half-promise of land. Now I hoped to complete the deal. And Duggur must go with me. Because of all the friendship, grown so fast between us within the fifty days, I made one more request as the high wind fumbled at the tent flaps with urgent fingers, and the guttering candle announced the evening ended.

"Abba Duggur," I said and, as he paused in the licking of his bowl the candle light showed a fat half-clothed figure grimed and bronzed by smoke, sun and weather waiting like a Laughing Buddha to hear the rest of my prayer, "Abba Duggur, will you speak for me tomorrow when we go to ask the *ombo* (the manager) for land? My words are few and poor and someone must speak well, for the affair is most important."

The Laughing Buddha no longer waited for my prayer but laughed aloud and his one tooth gleamed as his pudgy finger found the last bit of zho and then scooped it into his mouth. "Sherab, when we go with gifts and a long *ka-tak* (ceremonial scarf) on our hands to see the ombo I will speak such words as will surely give you a place in Lhamo, for I am a saying one among my people. After that we can visit together all the time. I will sit in your guest room and Dorje Mtso will pour 'tastiness' on the zho Troroma will bring. Just like now." He looked at his empty bowl with longing and then resolution appeared in his face.

"Troroma, come on—we must go. It is time to sleep. The *pehling* (foreigner) must sleep, for tomorrow we ride to Taktsang Lhamo and see the ombo of Gurdu about a house for Sherab Dzondri, Dorje Mtso and Da-whay who wish to live with us in the steppe country."

Behind Taktsang Lhamo, the largest peak—crowned with a special quiver shrine filled with iron arrows—was high in the sky, and we rode swiftly along the ridge leading to our

goal. At the bad spots along the trail we had ridden with due precaution, scouts out both in front and behind, but for the last two or three miles had relaxed our vigilance, riding at ease. Now, however, the members of the party brought their rifles to the ready and pulled their sword handles into convenient positions. Yet they had no real fear of danger. Although their tribal enemies of Rzakdumba also came to Lhamo, fighting rarely occurred right in the lamaseries. They were merely getting ready to exhibit *tsika*—appearance—for were we not a band of over twenty rifles and worth looking at?

But their dramatic preparations changed to real concern when, as we approached the last rise, the occasional crack of a rifle sounded along the valley below us, and on the brow of the hill a clump of stacked lances marked the sky line. Some wondered whether fighting had broken out between Lhamo's two lamaseries—Gurdu and Sechu—for a fairly constant state of bad feeling existed between them. Others surmised that an attack on the herders was taking place. But all our questionings were answered when some of the guard, grouped on the hilltop, rushed to tell us the news and admire our martial appearance. What, they wondered, was a pehling doing among the Samtsa riders?

The news was soon told, and the telling was greatly relished both by tellers and hearers. The day before, Rzakdumba had raided the herds of Sechu lamasery, wounding a herder and driving off two horses. Because a number of the *bonzes* (monks) of Sechu had horses that were not out with

their herds but tied up in stables, the *ramta* (posse or pursuit party) had gathered with unforeseen promptness. They caught up with the raiders, killed two and recovered the horses.

"Good fellows! Good Tibetans! Brave sons!" The members of the Samtsa party shouted their approval. Especially worthy of praise, they agreed, was the leader of the ramta, a certain Stretch Ears Jamtzen who had been the first to get within range of the raiders and to whose rifle and shooting the two casualties were attributed.

It was rather feared that Rzakdumba might respond by a general attack on the lamasery. That was the reason for the testing of guns and ammunition in progress in the valley below. Bonzes from the lamasery scouted on every hilltop, their lances stacked like arrows in the quiver shrines of the mountain gods. As we rode on someone suggested hopefully that the Rzakdumba raiders might attack that very night. We skirted the lamasery and loped down the hill past a camp of freshly pitched tents, where the sorcerers were chanting curses and casting spells to blast and perplex the men of Rzakdumba. Under such circumstances our entry was doubly dramatic, and the Samtsa party vastly enjoyed the sensation we created as we rode at a smart trot past the trading post and splashed across the stream to the Gurdu side of the valley.

There we were close under the shadow of the great peaks that rise from behind the dark blanket of a sacred forest of spruces. Rooms were allotted to us in the ombo's guest

quarters. Some of the Moslem and Chinese traders living in the trading post or staying in the rooms of the guest quarters came to greet us. They asked for news and seemed curious to know why foreigners had left Chinese country and come to this out-of-the-way place far up on the Tibetan steppe in the shadow of the great mountains. They wanted to talk in Chinese, they said, because *we* were different from "these wild Tibetans." But as I was a member of a Tibetan party, we talked in Tibetan and I stayed in the circle of my group close beside fat old Duggur, my friend and sponsor, who played the role of leader.

After the meal we laid out lengths of satin and brocade I had brought as presents; folding them so that the sheen and figures in the pattern would show to the best advantage. Then with one of Duggur's companions from Samtsa carrying half the gift and my servant carrying the other half, the old man and I crossed the big courtyard to the entrance of the ombo's private quarters.

The guest quarters of the Gurdu lamasery were old, drunken with decay, and the buildings around the great courtyard—paved unevenly with flagstones—seemed to stagger with tipsy laughter, while gaping doors and windows shouted their derision. Groups of bonzes stood under the sagging galleries and the jests and queries I overheard put that derision into words. From the inner courtyard sounded the clamor of cymbals and drums and the hoarse, senseless moaning of the twelve-foot trumpets. A special chanting service was being celebrated.

Our reception was friendly enough, and when we had given our gifts and bowed with our tongues hanging out—the extended tongue being the ultimate of Tibetan good manners—we were shown to seats and served tea. When we had satisfied the ombo's curiosity about the state of our health and the details of our journey, the time came to speak of other things. I briefly presented Duggur as my spokesman in the matter. I am sure the speech he made was a masterpiece, though what with rhetorical devices, stock proverbs, allusions and speed of delivery, I could only catch the general trend. His words flowed on: a stream, a torrent, a waterfall of utterance. But hope rose within me. Again and again the steady rumbling of the ombo's litany, as he clicked his beads and prayed, was broken when he paused to follow the turns of the old man's oratory. With a final burst of words, Duggur halted, and silence came back into the little courtyard. Even the ombo's praying ceased.

The trumpets and drums in the adjoining court throbbed and moaned. Then, like a soloist feeling for his lead in the accompaniment, the ombo began his answer. It flowed even faster than Duggur's speech. But it was smooth, and less emphatic: more like a prayer said to the clicking of the beads. Dismayed, I caught the salient points, clear and distinct as the clicking of the beads.

"It must be said . . . the foreigner . . . good friend of Gurdu . . . always to be reckoned as a guest . . . come and stay any time . . . but not to live . . . no land would be given . . . no house rented . . . the bringer of a different religion

. . . cannot stay in Taktsang Lhamo . . . by the Twelve Sacred Books, no . . . again by the powers of the Temple and the Mummy of the Buddha . . . indeed no."

Long before the ombo reached the last "no" Duggur was gone. He had waited for the answer with something of assurance in his face. We had been quartered in the very best rooms the ruinous guest house boasted, our gifts had been received, and the ombo had nodded more than once as he listened to the speech. But as the ombo replied, Duggur's face changed quickly until he could stand it no more, and with an angry interruption—a half-muttered question: "Why then did you accept the gifts?"—he rose to his feet and, emptying his unfinished tea, thrust his bowl into the folds of his coat and walked out. The steady rhythm of the ombo's utterance never faltered. It went smoothly on: the beads of his rosary rippled through his hands as if it were merely a prayer. But it was definite refusal, and it dashed the hopes his half-promise of two years before had raised.

Duggur wasn't in our quarters: his saddlebags and raincoat had been removed and his horses were no longer tied in the courtyard. He had evidently left, taking the rest of the party with him: gone where the chagrin of refusal would be less keen. My servant had to see about buying some *tsamba* (parched barley flour) in the trading post, for our supplies were running low, but I had no desire to spend the afternoon where the clamor of cymbals and the moan of the trumpets laughed at our discomfiture. Quite far up on the mountainside, near the edge of the sacred forest, I found a seat and looked at Taktsang Lhamo.

On the Sechu side of the valley warlike preparations went on apace: rifles were tested and men gathered on the flats beside the stream. Halfway up the mountain, the tents of the sorcerers brought the powers of religion into the feud, and on the mountain tops the bonzes kept guard beside the stacked lances.

But on the Gurdu side of the valley, by a contrast that seemed consciously smug and even a bit scornful, a religious festival went on. Pilgrims crowded the shrines and holy places, while the sound of the trumpets gave voice to the prayers that distance swallowed. Far off, trade caravans would be moving from all directions toward Taktsang Lhamo on trails that led over wide passes to the tent country of northeast Tibet. We, the missionaries, wished to live in the region, and work among its wild and reckless people. But we could not. We had no entrance, no place in all the activity that filled the Goddess of the Tiger's Den. It seemed strange to me that this place, twelve thousand feet above sea level, and often swept by storm, hail, and howling blizzards, should be drenched by the sunshine of a perfect Tibetan day as I looked it over for the last time, and renounced hope of ever living there.

Next day I was glad to be going: glad to get away. My servant and I roped our loads in the coldly falling rain. The road from the guest quarters to the stream was a brook of muddy water, and the stream itself was a torrent across which we could barely make our way.

Duggur had sent word that he would join us somewhere along the trail. But it wasn't until we had passed the

drenched and dripping tents of the sorcerers and were abreast of the Sechu lama's residence that he appeared, riding along the slippery muddy path with haste and shouting for me to stop. There was an odd exultation in his voice. We must stop, he said, long enough to see the Sechu ombo and have a bowl of tea. Get out a present and come on. Such was the burden of his argument.

I demurred. If I left my saddle it would be wetter than ever when I returned. Why not ride on and get back to Samtsa and the comfort of our tents? And all the while there stirred within me an aversion to seeing an ombo, even a different ombo. One more ombo in Taktsang Lhamo meant nothing to me. I had had enough of them to last me for some time. But the old man urged me insistently, with an undertone of suppressed excitement. He begged me not to hesitate over giving one more gift. He begged me not be stingy. And he licked his fist in the swift derisive gesture with which the Tibetan stigmatizes stinginess. At last, present in hand, I followed him into the audience room of the ombo of Sechu.

This man was younger than the Gurdu ombo, less polite, more brusque, with a keen scornful face in which there was an odd intentness as he asked the polite greetings and ordered tea and food placed before us.

"Always we will be friends whenever we meet," he intoned oratorically. "The Sechu ombo, the bonzes and all—and the bonzes of Sechu are brave fellows as Rzakdumba learned to their sorrow when Stretch Ears Jamtzen followed on revenge—when ever we meet, we will be friends of the

foreigner, Akku Sherab Dzondri." His hands turned outward briefly in the polite gesture.

The words meant little enough to me, I thought, or to him either, for he no doubt knew that we had been denied permission to live in Lhamo.

We drank the last of our tea and went out into the cold driving rain. My saddle was as wet and soggy as I had known it would be. The valley behind us was filled with rain, and the lances of the guards, who, still afraid of attack, huddled on the hilltop, were half lost in the clouds that drove over the pass and shut out the last view of Taktsang Lhamo. I turned my horse to follow the others. Duggur seemed to sense my thoughts. His voice sounded hoarsely confidential through the patter of wind-driven rain and the splashing of the horses' hooves.

"Sherab, I am still a good talker of words among my people. Even if the ombo of Gurdu wouldn't listen to them, the ombo of Sechu did. Ayah! How much I talked for you all night long; telling how good you are, how you heal the wounded and help little children and how, because you have lived for fifty days at my tent door, I am ready to stake all I have on your integrity."

The words above the splashing of the rain had no pattern of meaning for me. It was good to know that old Duggur thought well of me. But I just did not care what the ombo of Sechu heard about me—or even what his opinion might be. Yet Duggur's words went on. He, at least, seemed completely satisfied.

"And then I told him," said Duggur, "that, as Gurdu would not give you a place to live, and if Sechu lamasery did, the faces of the Gurdu ombo and all of Gurdu—mouth of hell to them!—would smart for nine generations. Sechu and Gurdu are enemies too, and because of all these things the ombo of Sechu says that you can come and live on the Sechu side of the stream, even if you do bring a religion other than the religion of the Enlightened One."

"Live in Taktsang Lhamo. . . ." Suddenly, above the splashing of the rain, the words of the old man—Laughing Buddha on horseback, a rifle on his back and the rain streaming down his raincoat—were full of meaning. We were to go back to that valley below us and live among those wild and reckless people. Even now they sat in the rain waiting for their enemies to attack them.

But Duggur was still talking with no attempt at being confidential: " . . . and I will come and sit in your guest room, Troroma will bring me zho, Dorje Mtso will put tastiness—fine and white—upon it, and we will all eat it together, for we are friends."

With a sudden lift of spirits I nodded agreement and urged my horse to a quicker gait. Duggur kept pace. My family and I had been given permission to live at Taktsang Lhamo among the nomads of northeast Tibet.

II

The Haunted House

The Tibetan monk who sat across from me upon the rugs and mats of the guest room called himself Akku Wanjur, and was so addressed by all who spoke to him. However, throughout four or five different tribes he was known as Kachara, Fence Teeth. Friend or foe spoke of him thus, and indeed this nickname was pitilessly apt as are most such names bestowed by common appraisal. In northeast Tibet some nicknames are merely abbreviations or mutilations of proper names, and are used in direct address, but for the most part these nicknames are descriptive and based on some personal idiosyncrasy; savagely candid as the conversation of little children. Savage candor is modified, however, by the fact that such names are never used in direct address, and the polite fiction is maintained that their possessors are unconscious of them.

The remarkable restraint the Tibetans exercise in consistently calling a man by one name when speaking to him or in his presence, while referring to him by another in every

other circumstance, is the result of training, certain definite habits of thought, and possibly the fact that drastic action so often follows a personal affront. The custom is an awful pitfall for the outlander feeling his way in the unfamiliar maze of primitive usages and taboos. But my Tibetan friends were tolerant of my blunders, although some of them, known by such names as Slab Face, Stretch Ears, Squint Eye and Mastiff Muzzle, caused me no small embarrassment when we engaged in casual, friendly conversation.

Now, as Fence Teeth smiled his wide, revealing smile showing all those teeth, I mentally told myself to be careful and not call him by his current, all too descriptive nickname. But the subject matter of his miniature oration—for upon every possible and impossible occasion Tibetans either break into rhythmic narrative that contains the germ of epic poetry or climb the heights of oratory and debate—soon made me forget everything about nicknames. After tedious circumlocutions he arrived at news that promised a solution to one of the problems closely related to the future of our stay in Taktsang Lhamo.

The wall-builders had erected a fairly adequate wall around our grant of land on a strategic knoll overlooking the stream, but the building season was far advanced and before winter weather set in there was no chance of putting up any sort of living quarters within those protecting walls. My friends unanimously agreed that, if the compound were unoccupied all winter, the walls by spring would be in ruin.

Too many ill-disposed people were apt to prowl on dark nights.

It was sometimes possible to buy a house, and as frames, walls and ceilings in Tibet are all held together by ingenious grooves, joints and pegs, such a dwelling can be taken down and moved to any desired site. We had searched fruitlessly for a house like this that would serve as temporary quarters in our new compound. Taktsang Lhamo is well up on the rim of the Tibetan plateau, and all building material must be brought laboriously on yakback from forests one day's journey down in the valley. For this reason, in the lamaseries, as well as in the trading posts, houses of any sort are exceedingly scarce.

Akku Wanjur's talk touched first on the difference between his religious beliefs and ours. What was forbidden or disastrous for any Tibetan would no doubt be all right for us. Were we then, he asked, afraid of the *lha* (gods) of the mountain tops, the *klu* (serpent spirits) of the springs, the *bdud* (demons) from hell or the *ndre* (ghosts)? And especially, were we afraid of the ghostly ndre? Did we believe they could harm us? My utter disregard of all such spirit beings seemed to reassure him and at last he mentioned our need of a house.

"The house of the former steward of Gurdu lamasery—my lamasery across the stream—is for sale," he told me. "It has belonged to one of the monks' communes for several years and is a good house. One hundred and twenty ounces of silver will buy it, but if it is to be bought it must be

bought immediately," he urged. Now he was coming to the point.

"The house is excellent. The steward took two years to build it and the timbers are the very best. Then just after it was finished the steward was killed. It is practically new, for no one has lived in it since."

It seemed to me that his eyes wavered a moment at this point. He stopped to drink his tea. But I was off on the trail of a buy, although deep in my consciousness a warning bell was trying to ring. Then I remembered that the Gurdu lamasery authorities had consistently refused to permit the sale and removal of buildings from within their limits. Buying the steward's house would entail not only its removal outside the Gurdu lamasery, but to the Sechu side of the stream. And the stream marked the jealously maintained boundary between the two lamasery realms within Taktsang Lhamo.

Wanjur showed his famous teeth as he swept aside my objections.

"That will be all right. The commune wish to divide the value of the inheritance, or at least have some good out of it. No one in the lamasery will buy the house. It will be all right to move it." Again his eyes wavered a bit uncertainly, as though distressed at meeting mine.

All the details of the deal went through smoothly enough. The house was a real bargain. The leader of the monks' commune was singularly easy to deal with. However, before I weighed the sale price of one hundred and twenty ounces

of silver, I went to see the steward, or manager, of Gurdu lamasery to make sure I would be allowed to move the house. Somewhat gruffly he gave his official permission and the deal was closed.

At daybreak five carpenters and a motley crowd of laborers—men and women—began tearing down the house and packing it piecemeal the half-mile across the stream on my caravan of yaks. Yaks are strange double-jointed creatures with a weird gift for throwing loads or riders. But somehow, by the matchless ingenuity Tibetans display when it comes to roping any and every sort of load, window frames, doors, clapboards and panelings were delivered load after load until the pile of stacked timbers within our walled compound gave good promise of a house and shelter during the coming winter. The chief of the wrecking crew had stirred the workers to a fine frenzy of effort by beginning the killing and cooking of two sheep on a bit of natural lawn beside the stream.

At the noon halt my caravan leader came to me with dismal forebodings. A terrific disagreement had broken out between two factions in the Gurdu lamasery. Apparently the humiliation of seeing one of the lamasery houses torn down and carried onto strange ground for the use of an outlander was causing trouble. Although the members of the particular commune that had sold the house were helping loyally and giving all the protection they could, some of the monks had begun to utter ugly threats and carry stones in their hands.

With each trip of the wrecking crew and the yak caravan the remaining timbers of the house loomed increasingly skeleton-like across the rooftops of Gurdu lamasery. I felt that if trouble would only hold off for another six hours we could finish the task. The lunch period was shortened and work speeded up, but an hour later the yaks stampeded home with empty saddles and pack ropes trailing, urged to headlong flight by a shower of stones. The laborers followed, carrying stones in their own hands and bandying threats with a group of monks close on their heels.

Around the fire, over which pots of meat were cooking, the wrecking crew chattered excitedly. They urged swift, drastic action. If only I would arm them they were prepared to bring back those few remaining timbers of the house in spite of what the monks might do. A couple of the more hotheaded ones even went so far as to sharpen their swords ostentatiously.

While they ate I sent a messenger to the lamasery headquarters, in the hope that a moderate appeal on the basis of the official permission which had already been granted would clear up what should be merely a temporary hitch or misunderstanding. The reply to my appeal was curt and brief: it had been decided that the house should remain in the lamasery. I was to take back what had been torn down and make it all as before.

For two weeks we got no further. Those who were truly neutral in the matter enjoyed the joke immensely. The Gurdu lamasery had the posts and beams—the ribs of the

house open and uncovered under the changing sky—and I had the walls, ceilings and floorboards, all stacked in a confused pile beneath temporary shelter inside the enclosure overlooking the stream. It was a perfect deadlock, and at intervals Fence Teeth—distressed beyond words—came to see me. He even brought the price of the house; adding "return indemnity" of fifteen ounces of silver, thinking that if I would accept the refund the deal would be called off. But one hundred and twenty ounces of silver wouldn't provide my family with shelter through the coming winter. I refused the money and demanded the remainder of my house. Then the lamasery authorities demanded the remainder of *their* house. No one dared cross the stream and take what he demanded.

But Fence Teeth wasn't the only one who came to see me. After all it is hard for Tibetans to remain truly neutral very long. A friend from the Samtsa tribe came in to see me and talked darkly of bringing a group of armed riders if I would but say the word. Messages of support and reassurance came from yet another friend, Slab Face Rinchen, twenty miles away in Bu. And then one evening Trinlan, a young official of Sechu lamasery on our side of the stream, rode in. He chuckled when he found me gazing ruefully at the pile that was a sadly scrambled house without a frame.

"What are you going to do with it Sherab?" he questioned, a quizzical smile wrinkling his dark face. "Keep it under that shelter all year? That's all right. You can keep

it dry when it rains. But what can they do with that?" And he pointed derisively to where the scaffold-like frame showed above distant housetops across the stream. "There is nothing they can do with that. It is no use to them at all. Don't give in. This lamasery is with you. Don't open your mouth (in agreement). Just be like a stubborn yak."

After dark there came another guest—the leader of the commune in Gurdu lamasery—and he was frankly rebellious.

"We have over two hundred members in our commune," he declaimed, "and the house never did us any good until I found a buyer for it. The silver would mean a big festival for us all. None of us ever dared even to sleep in the house—" here he glanced at me in sudden confusion—"but of course it would be all right for you. Just don't give in. If worst comes to worst our commune will secede and leave the lamasery. But the one thing we will do before we leave will be to bring the rest of your house and pour it at your door."

He drank some more tea and then a faint note of amusement crept into his voice. "You are a teacher of religion. If you want to start a new lamasery we'll come and be the beginning of it for you. There is your chance: two hundred monks who have learning, wealth, much merit and a wide reputation among the tribes. Well, don't give up your claim to the house we sold you. We are doing much talking for you on our side of the stream."

Finally the day came when Gurdu lamasery got tired of roundabout threats and messages. Suddenly, through the

strange wireless of communal feeling, everyone knew that trouble was about to begin. A monk brought the final word. If the boards, panels, doorframes and all were not returned by noon the monks would come and get them.

The time had come for the playing of the last hand. My best friend in the Sechu lamasery—Jamtzen, who, behind his back, was called Stretch Ears—had been instrumental in helping us to settle in Taktsang Lhamo. He was regarded as one of our sponsors, but had so far remained enigmatically aloof from the whole affair. I had longed for his counsel and advice, and had even wondered if he were not in favor of my case, but I had refrained from making any appeal for his help. One did not go around seeking help from one's friends. It simply was not done. One's friends rallied around without being asked.

Now, dramatically carrying the Russian rifle that was his dearest possession, Stretch Ears came down to the place where the four walls of our compound overlooked the boundary stream. There he placed himself and, remarking that one could have very good shooting, made it clear to all that he had entered the case. He interjected a number of grumbling asides to the effect that only an outlander would buy a house or want a house that belonged to the ndre. But after all, said he, if the outlander wanted it, and had fairly received permission to buy and move it, he should have it. "Yes, by the Twelve Sacred Books—Yim."

"But Jamtzen," I said, and in my excitement I almost called him Stretch Ears—they loomed so large on either side

of his grim face—"I don't want you to shoot a man just over my house."

"Shoot a man!" he exploded, "shoot several! Yes shoot as many as come across! I am the best shot in Lhamo."

Afternoon passed but the bluff had been played out and just at dusk Fence Teeth and Trinlan, the young official—for he too had been going back and forth on missions of rather truculent diplomacy—came to tell me that I had been granted an interview about the affair of the house. With a little present and a scarf of felicity in my hands I should go, he said, with them to see the authorities of Gurdu Lamasery about moving *my* house. "The 'haunted house,'" the young official specified, and Fence Teeth's eyes flicked uneasily as they watched mine.

The rest of the affair was mere routine. Next day the house—and now I knew full well that it was haunted, for the dreadful ghostly ndre of the dead owner plagued the monks and would not let them sleep in it—was finally reassembled as a residence for the outlander within the four walls that rose somewhat like a fort overlooking the boundary stream.

Quite some time later, when the inevitable sheep had been killed and the steaming meat was laid out on platters in the guest room, the leader of the commune, Fence Teeth, the young official from the lamasery, my Samtsa friend, Slab Face Rinchen from Bu, Stretch Ears and I all feasted in celebration of victory. Each of my friends was sure that he had turned the trick. It might have been the rumor of secession, it might have been the menace of Stretch Ears'

rifle, it might have been the threat of armed riders coming for a sudden coup, or the hesitant but earnest effort of the more timid Fence Teeth; yet somehow I thought that the ghostly ndre had much to do with it, although I didn't bring him in and introduce him to my guests in all their festive, congratulatory mood. The commune had the one hundred and twenty ounces of silver, I had the house, and only the ndre might have felt cheated out of a comfortable private residence.

III

The Power of Silence

Winter had arrived, but at what was a good rate of speed for a yak caravan we traveled over the hills and wide shallow valleys of the Tibetan steppe. The cattle were still well fleshed from the summer's grazing and under our insistent urging shuffled along at a jogging trot, skeleton loads and empty saddles tossing on the horn-crested wave of closely packed backs. Strung out across the trail five or six Tibetans and myself rode on the flank of the drove, cracking the whips and talking to the jostling cattle in a musical refrain: "Dzo-dzo-dzo-dzo-ee-whwet," which my companions varied with guttural and picturesque oaths. But above their swearing sounded the steady praying of the more serious-minded of the horsemen, and throughout both the swearing and the praying ran also a steady current of conversation—witty, pungent, personal and laughter-provoking.

The Tibetan winter with its arctic cold had locked the bogs and streams, so we rode at will over slope and marshland that was either carpeted with soft, wilted yellow hay,

or strewn with the pale skeletons and broken, tangled stalks of the coarser grasses. For all the cold the sun had dried the infrequent snows from off the ground, except on the northern exposures where dirty patches of snow and sifted dust made irregular patterns. Beyond that white and yellow patchwork, through which herds of white and yellow gazelle moved with curiosity-driven unease, or streaked away at incredible speeds when stampeded by fear, we saw at last the smoke and dust clouds over the winter encampments and the slowly shifting herds in the winter pastures. A certain tension that had marked our progress disappeared; rifles were lifted from saddle bows and slung more comfortably over the riders' backs. Bolstered by the comparative security of nearness to the encampments, the conversation swelled with laughter and jest, against which those who prayed brought forth their deepest chest tones.

On a hillside bare of snow and covered with a thick growth of short hay—yellow and dry, yet soft and clean—we all stopped to change our socks, for our somewhat shapeless felt-lined boots were partly stuffed with hay which warmed and protected our feet. As we sat sorting handfuls of hay, my close friend Duggur raised his voice from the steady grumble of prayer to a rather whimsical comment on silence.

"It is all *ka* (mouth) with the Tibetans," he philosophized. "The Chinese seal things with letters but the Tibetans seal them with words. You are better than you used to be, but you should learn all the manners of speech, for though you are a man of letters yet when important affairs are talked

you have me speak for you. Yes, you should write less and talk more. . . ." His voice broke on a high note of amusement. "Even when you write," he said, "you mostly use a machine."

At this a ripple of kindly yet half-hesitant derision appeared in his steady stream of conversation, and as we rode toward the encampment the flow of language (not forgetting the prayers to whatever gods might be, together with oaths and shouts at the cattle) was at flood tide.

Yet in spite of all Duggur's praise of speech, at the encampment where we turned in through the cattle pens and came to the big hut with its plastered walls and sod roof of Duggur's two-tent family, we came to an oddly muted and silent household. Ama Doko, the elder of Duggur's two wives, smiled a rather grim, though nonetheless friendly, smile. But of speech, only a torrent of prayers, "O mani padmi hum!" ("O the jewel in the lotus!") burst from her under high pressure. Then, behind closed lips, she grunted and strangled in a strange, half-articulate speech only partially intelligible to the other members of the household.

The occasion was one for much conversation. We had come from the lamasery of Taktsang Lhamo where something was always going on and the liveliest news circulated constantly. Ama Doko was fairly bursting with desire to ask us questions, yet could only pray and gurgle masked sounds which I couldn't in the least understand. Nama, her daughter-in-law, also gestured frantically and tried to talk behind tightly closed lips. Only Wotrug, the daughter, asked

in her husky girlish alto the polite questions of greeting and welcome. The others were performing a religious vow of silence—silence for a day and a night or perhaps for a number of days—in order that merit might be achieved or blessing might come. Prayers were the only permitted utterances to pass their lips. This meant that they prayed explosively and more frequently than usual and tried to make gestures do duty for words.

"I thought it is always ka among the Tibetans?" I said teasingly to Duggur while he poured my tea, his left palm turned up in the gesture of respect as he served. "They speak even worse Tibetan than I do." But the only answer to my jibe was his one-toothed grin as he punctiliously played the host to a guest in the big tent.

Later as we ate our second meal in the "little," or smaller tent of the two-tent family I asked Troroma, Duggur's younger wife, how it was that she had ka when the older wife did not.

"But Ama Doko has ka," she persisted, "a very fine ka—hot ka—yes, by the books, good ka, much better than mine." At this remark Duggur gave an amused grunt and a chuckle of mirth went around the fireside group. "And as to vows of silence, I too make them and keep them, but of course not as many as Ama Doko, for I am—yes, a little younger. . . ."

She paused and her eyes sought Duggur's with a deeply significant look. Its nuances did not escape the Tibetan members of the group and Duggur drew a fire of rather

ribald comment for having two wives. There was an interval of prolonged baiting. Even Troroma, for all she had no "mouth" to compare with the older wife, helped the fun along with giggles and sly asides.

But Duggur maintained his reputation for oratory and wound up with: "Look how fat I am. That is what having two wives does for a man. They both give me the best food, each afraid that I will no longer sit at her fireside if the butter isn't fresh. The tea is always just right in color and taste. Let us get you a Tibetan wife, Sherab Dzondri, for if you had two wives you wouldn't be so dried up and skinny. You might have the figure of a man."

At this he glanced down rather proudly at all of himself that overflowed above his half-discarded coat. From the laughter that followed I suspect he felt he had turned, or at least deflected, the tide of ridicule. He rose and went about his affairs, leaving me to sit by the fire, drink tea and toast my fingers.

The "small tent" of the family—among this tribe the word tent equally applies to the cow dung plastered, sod-roofed hut of the winter encampment—was a tiny affair compared to the big tent. Instead of the board floor around the fireplace there was only a carpet of carefully spread hay which made the hut a nestlike lair. The low roof and leaning walls crowded close. A layer of smoke that seemed to hang from the roof was close above our heads yet made the cheer of the fire all the brighter, and in that little space everything was neat and well kept. Troroma, although she was alter-

nately busied with the day's churning and keeping my bowl filled with tea, was a good tent wife. Something however about the modest, even meager, but well ordered arrangements raised a question in my mind, and half in fun I asked Troroma whether Duggur spent more of his time in the big tent than in the little one.

"Isn't the hay as comfortable to sit on as the board floor by Ama Doko's fire?" she countered. "I know what you think. You think that Abba Dzopa Duggursjap's wealth is divided into two halves and he only enjoys the good of one half—the smaller half. But when it was all in one tent it wasn't any comfort for him. I was a servant and he liked me well. We two"—here Troroma paused in consideration of known differences of viewpoint, smiled deprecatingly and then went on—"We two were happy. We Tibetans are like that. A servant may be as though she were a wife and yet have no tent, but if she is called a wife then she should have a tent.

"But Ama Doko," Troroma paused again. "Sherab Dzondri, you don't know how fierce she is. She had been to Lhasa with Abba, she was wife in the tent, but she was never satisfied. Again and again she went away to her friends in Shetsang. But she shouldn't have taken from the wealth of Abba's tent to give to the men she lived with. Then another time she was angry at Abba, and while he was away she moved the tent and everything to another tribe and that affair had to be settled. Until it was, Abba didn't even have a tent of his own in which to stay. So that is why the wealth

was divided into the larger and the smaller part and I became the small wife in the small tent."

Her face, which had been wrinkled in a slight frown while concentrating on making things plain to me, cleared with satisfaction and pride as she added, "But Abba lives here all the time, though he does drink his tea in the big tent too, for Abba is just, even to Ama Doko, though her mouth is fierce and hot. And you, too, Sherab Dzondri, because you are our best friend, must stay in the small tent, even if you drink tea in the big one. You should have brought Dorje Mtso with you and then the four of us would have had a happy time. But anyway, you must stay in the small tent. This is where Abba's best friends stay. Though you will drink in the big one be sure and come back. We will make a warm sleeping place here for you because this tent is warmer than the big tent."

I had barely put my own private bowl, made of grapevine root figured like birdseye maple, inside my coat when Duggur returned and urged me to the big tent where a special feast had been prepared. Presently we sat in the greater grandeur of Ama Doko's fireside, eating the unusual delicacy of meat dumplings. Even Duggur seemed somewhat startled at the magnificence of the spread and a certain pride showed through all his service as he plied me with dumplings until I couldn't eat another one. Ama Doko poured tea and gestured frantically while she prayed with explosive energy. Whatever the power of silence to influence distant gods, there and then Ama Doko badly wanted

speech. When I had drunk my last bowlful of tea and duly licked out the bowl, preparatory to placing it inside my coat, Duggur with obvious reluctance translated for my benefit some of that peculiar speech she articulated behind vow-sealed lips.

"She says to send for your saddlerug and your saddle for a pillow and stay here tonight—to drink your 'late tea' here, and sleep in the big tent." Somehow I felt that Duggur was cleaving strictly to the role of interpreter and that he himself had no part in the invitation. While I hesitated Ama Doko grunted and strangled yet more energetically. "She says—" Duggur interrupted himself to exclaim, "Mouth of hell, what a mouth she has! Doesn't she know we don't talk that way to you?"

Wotrug giggled and Dorlo, the son of the big tent, chuckled in amusement as Duggur rose. "Come on, Sherab," urged Duggur, "you must now drink tea in the little tent and we shall see where you shall sleep."

As we left, Ama Doko's praying sounded for a moment in angry disgust: "O mani padmi hum—O mani padmi hum." And the innocent phrase, "O the jewel in the lotus," was twisted by grim and angry lips into something quite out of harmony with its placid philosophy.

Night had already come. The wind, dying at sunset, was gathering force again, throwing dust and ash from the encampment dumps that stood like silent sentinels before the entrances of the cattle pens and huts. Dorlo, his wife, Nama, and Wotrug formed an escort, swinging whips and throw-

ing stones at the fierce dogs that lunged like hungry shadows. These ferocious animals are kept in nomadic encampments for protection against thieves. One slipped through the barrage and came toward me, but I was carrying my Tibetan sword unsheathed. Although local custom demanded I use only the back of the sword, I aimed a blow at the beast's muzzle, and suspect I gave him a throbbing toothache. Other figures came to meet us, and Wotrug and Nama turned back when they saw that Troroma and the servant woman of the smaller tent were also swinging poles. But Dorlo stayed with us to see me safely to my destination. Reminded by Troroma's insistent warning in my ear, I bent almost double under the low entrance to find my way into the nestlike comfort of the little tent.

It was very late before we all turned in, each one making his bed in the allotted space beside the fire. The blue flames of the cow-chip fuel leaped in sudden flashes to the canopy of smoke above that swirled and changed as the night winds eddied through the vent in the roof. After I was tucked and wrapped for the night in my big coat, Troroma brought me my "late tea" which I drank raised on one elbow. Shadows flickered as the fire dwindled. I was unbelievably replete, having eaten meat and drunk curds in great quantities to show I thought as much of Troroma's providing as the dumplings of the big tent. Now perforce, I drank a nightcap that crowned all the feasting with uneasy dreams and fits of wakefulness. In one of these, I heard Duggur orating in his sleep.

"Maybe the Tibetans do have to take a vow of silence once in a while to get a rest," I thought. The low droning went on and on, lulling me at last to deeper sleep.

Months later the memory of that insistent hospitality cheered us on as we again followed a yak caravan toward Duggur's encampment. The landscape was once more a pattern of changing shadows but this time streaks of brilliant sunshine, where alpines bloomed triumphant, alternated with the dark shadows of cloudbanks which petulantly dropped their sheets of stinging rain wherever they loitered. The bogs were a treacherous maze through which we moved unevenly; the cattle pulled their feet out of the sucking mud with a certain sturdy assurance, but the horses snorted and lunged in panic whenever the spongy carpet began to quiver and break beneath their hooves. A sudden squall of rain and hail and fear of attack by robbers had made the noon halt more than ordinarily brief. We had eaten little, so the prospect of the two meals—one in each of Duggur's tents—did not daunt us. We hurried across the steppe toward the distant tents that clustered in circles like black spiders along the streams that cut the plain into segments.

Duggur himself carefully pointed to the spot where the tether lines were to be drawn. This automatically placed our camp and indicated the arrangement of our tents. According to custom our location was between the two tents—the big one and the little one—yet when the cattle were tethered

and the tents raised, we were appreciably nearer the little tent than the big one. The last peg of our camp had scarcely been driven when Duggur came to get us, and, contrary to all the routine of the past, we were first escorted to the little tent. This time Dorje Mtso and Da-whay were both along—the entire family—and, as Troroma had stated, we could all be happy together. But now it was Troroma who was tongue-tied with religious obligation and as half-articulate as Ama Doko had been on the previous occasion. Fortunately for her there was a less compelling necessity for speech than at that earlier time because we were to stay quite a while. The grazing was excellent, there was plenty of milk and butter, and the prospect of picnics and many pleasant hours in their tent or in ours stretched before us so, although Troroma grinned and gurgled as we joked about her speechlessness, we all knew there was no real hurry.

When we came out of Troroma's tent, Dorlo and Wotrug were waiting to escort us to the big tent. Beside them stood Duggur, who gravely directed: "Now you will drink tea in the big tent." But, although he accompanied us half the way, he came no further and turned back just as the rest of the family welcomed us.

No vow of silence chained Ama Doko's tongue. While we sat drinking tea and milk and eating all the extra delicacies, cheese, and something of mysterious origin bound into a cake with solidified butter and a network of yak hair, her mouth—the good mouth, hot mouth, fierce mouth of a Tibetan conversationalist—ran wild. It was not that she

spoke with special fluency: indeed, by our standards her speech was oddly halting in meaning. But she filled in all the natural gaps and pauses with a shrill vocal padding that had no kinship with words. In the midst of this incoherent torrent of syllables she pumped us for news and jested and joked, her grim mouth awry.

Turning to Dorje Mtso, she facetiously invited her to become her daughter-in-law. She offered to find me a Tibetan wife—first suggesting Nama, or Wotrug—and then enlarged on how fine a second wife would be for all concerned. To carry the war into the enemy's country I asked her just how fine she found the matter of a second wife. Ama Doko's face never changed, but her rambling discourse became more disjointed than ever. There was something to be said for the Tibetan custom of two tents for two wives, she muttered, but the wealth should not be divided equally. And the guests should stay in the big tent. Did I remember when I had slept elsewhere? Did Dorje Mtso like it that I stayed where Troroma was? And was the little tent neatly kept, and how many bowls were ranged behind the fire? What did we have to eat? Why hadn't we camped nearer the big tent? What had Abba Duggur said to us? As she rambled on, I sensed that the rest of the family were holding their breaths and I began to hold my own, not knowing what we would hear next.

"If he doesn't soon talk," she said, and I assumed Ama Doko was referring to Duggur's hitherto unexplained silence toward her, "I'll get my friends from Shetsang. I'll move the tent—by the Precious Magic I will—I'll make an affair that

can never be settled. He drinks no more tea by this fire but at least he should speak. For a dumb yak there is treatment." By that time we were more than holding our breath. It was almost a relief when she got back on the matter of a Tibetan wife for me so that Dorje Mtso wouldn't have any work at all—no, not even at night—and we could have milch cows and a black tent and be nomads.

We lived for weeks between the two tents: serving as a sounding board off which bounced the plaints of Ama Doko, the worryings of Troroma and, what was of still greater import in the war of words, the silence of the old man. Troroma was somewhat triumphant, and well she might be, for the argument was over the undivided remainder of the family wealth which Ama Doko had under lock and key in the big tent, and which Duggur insisted must be divided, thus giving the smaller tent so much more that the two establishments would be on an equal economic footing thereafter. But Troroma was also frankly worried, for she had an utter fear of Ama Doko and of what she was capable in the matter of making trouble.

Only for us was the state of affairs an unmixed blessing. The rivalry between the two tents over the care of us as guests was intense, and never had we had such abundant supplies of fuel, fresh milk, curds, and such additional delicacies as fresh butter and cheese. The morning after our arrival a sheep was tied at our tent door for us to kill and use—the gift of the smaller tent—and five or six days later another one arrived from the big tent in the same way.

Duggur's boycott of silence was absolute and complete.

Once he was in our tent sharing our meal and Ama Doko came with milk. We of course pulled her in to have some of what we were eating, upon which he lapsed into speechlessness, his face assumed the mien of a bronze Buddha, and even after she had gone he disdained to answer my jibe about performing a vow of silence.

Finally, after Ama Doko's friends from Shetsang had actually been around for a day or two, and we hourly expected the attempted flight of the big tent from the tribe, to end, as such flights usually end, in a sort of running battle, the grim-faced Ama Doko could stand it no more. In the midst of a running discourse to us—alternately soothed and irritated by our sympathy and attempts to mollify her mounting wrath—her resolution broke completely.

"Sherab Dzondri," Ama Doko turned to me, and there was a note of resignation in her voice, "you can tell him he can have all the wealth. But he must speak—he must open his mouth—and he must drink his early tea by the fire of the big tent. Yes, and sometimes his late tea, too. Is her," she wouldn't say Troroma's name, "tea any better in flavor and color than mine that he should drink it all in that tent? Wealth doesn't matter, if only he will open his mouth."

Later in the day, while we watched, Duggur, his bowl in hand, moved sedately and with full consciousness of the dramatic significance of his progress, toward the big tent. I remembered his words: "Among the Tibetans it is ka that seals things." The women folk who vowed silence for the gods cheated only under great pressure and even than held

their lips tightly closed; the men talked and prayed that things might take place. But Duggur, his face fat and inscrutable, one tooth showing in a faint smile as he went to drink tea in the big tent, knew best of all when to talk and when to keep still. Among the Tibetans it is ka, he had said, and now he demonstrated the truth of that axiom.

IV

Pilgrimage and Love

Once again our caravan traveled toward the Samtsa region where Duggur had his encampment. The big black and tan caravan mastiff ranged ahead of the plodding oxen, quartering through the bushes like a bird dog after partridges, and as we came around the bend of the narrow valley in which the path twisted like a trailing packrope a sudden shrill flurry of voices announced that the dog had flushed something. Our Tibetan servant, Jarlo, came to life with surprising rapidity considering he had been fast asleep in the saddle as we crawled along in the bright forenoon sun. He galloped his horse ahead to where, with staves raised in a defensive gesture, two young Tibetan women were backed against a clump of bushes. Jamar, the mastiff, who had been growling tentatively, trying to make up his mind whether he should ignore them or hurl his hundred and fifty pounds in defiance against the challenges of the brandished staves, gave a final half-whimper and went on. Although strangers to him, they were yet women, and Tibetan dogs being

mostly fed by the women folk of the tents are appreciably less fierce to all women. So he passed them by. The two girls were chattering excitedly to Jarlo when we rode up to them.

By their very fear of the dog, if by nothing else, they proclaimed themselves of the "earthen houses" and not of the "black tents." All the peculiarities of their clothing, the cut of their boots, and the way their hair was braided in two clubs over their ears, confirmed that inference, too. And they were poor. Their sheepskin garments, which they wore kilted to knee length to facilitate walking, were worn and tattered. The packs they carried were meager, and even their boots, which were strapped on wooden carrying frames, were old and patched. Their boots they held in reserve as they walked the rough trail, stepping through the grass when possible yet treading too with horny-footed indifference on stones that even horses consciously avoided.

The two merged imperceptibly into our caravan, for they were going in the same direction, and when the oxen slyly attempted to hide behind the bushes and so drop out of the march for a bit of grazing, they hurled rocks with accuracy and force, shouting the yak drivers' call along with the rest of us, their slightly husky but pleasant voices threatening the cattle with all the pains of hell. At the noon halt they helped us gather fuel for the fire; and drank our tea. Jamar, seeing them admitted to the circle around the fire, decided to forget the offense of the staves they had waved in his face and, as he went the rounds with dripping jowls, begged lumps of tsamba from them too.

When we started I noticed their packs had been strapped to one of the lighter loads. And when we finally stopped to make camp under leaden skies in the coldly falling rain, they worked like everyone else to stack the loads and set up the tents. Later, they crowded with the rest of us into the cook tent where a fire of wet wood burned smokily, kept alive by steady, skillful manipulation of the bellows. The girls sat near the door, their grimed wooden bowls on the ground in front of them, and every once in a while, with cheerful indifference to the weather, went out into the rain to bring back armfuls of dripping firewood—wiping the wet from their bare arms and shoulders and drawing their worn sheepskin coats around them. Both were in their early twenties, and one was quite a beauty; yet neither had any ornament in her hair nor even a colored girdle to bring a touch of brightness to her dingy attire.

With the drinking of the first bowl of hot tea their tongues loosened. They were on *argyong* (starting on a pilgrimage) to Lhasa, they stated demurely, yet with an obvious sense of importance.

"O mani padmi hum!" burst out our old Tibetan guide in pious approbation and prayed busily for a few minutes.

Did they have any other companions and did they know the way? And did they have enough food to take them there? They answered no to all of our questions. But, they averred, the trails were full of travelers like us, the encampments of the black-tent people filled the grasslands and, though they were a bit afraid of robbers in the *gsardong*—the dreaded, empty no man's land between the tribes—yet

they would find the way. And as for provision, there was always the way of the beggar's bowl. Weren't they pilgrims and entitled to support in the carrying out of their project of piety?

But the tent country was full of fierce dogs and the nights were colder—even in the summertime—than any they had known in the sheltered farming country of the lower levels.

The matter of the dogs did bother them they admitted, and as to the cold they would sleep warm in some way. In all, the future held no troubles or worries for they were on pilgrimage to the holy city of Lhasa and hoped to get there in three months if all went well. And all would go well, "by the mercy of the lama." After all, tonight it was raining and yet they had shelter, and so it would be the rest of the way. In the meantime, "shata, bzangta"—fine, good—the Tibetan way of saying thanks.

We all gathered closer around the fire to eat and drink. Our new friends talked volubly about their pilgrimage but gave no hint of where their homes were and whence they came. Even a series of direct questions failed to place them in the matter of origin. Their speech revealed that they came from one of the hundreds of villages down toward the Chinese border, and now for the first time they were coming to nomad land. Lhasa—beyond all the plains and mountains of that unknown country—lay three months' journey away.

By the next day the pilgrims were an integral part of the caravan. As they strode sturdily along—fording the streams

and marching through the rain-wet grasses—they gathered wool from the bushes, left there by the grazing sheep. Stuffing it into their coats, they later twisted it between their fingers into thread which they used to sew up pack covers as they sat by the nightly campfires. Just beyond the last of the wooded country where the valley was no longer filled with brush, the more nourishing steppe grass promised good grazing, and because the cattle were still weak and thin we decided to stay over a day. An armed sentinel was posted on the shoulder of the hill overlooking the camp to give warning of approaching horsemen. With a good pile of firewood stacked high in front of the cook tent, this being the last point where firewood was available, we burned it recklessly. There was little to do except sit in the sun and eat and drink.

The two pilgrims industriously patched their already much-patched clothing, and there was considerable discussion about the pilgrim road to Lhasa. But once, when riders were sighted coming up the trail from the farming country we had left behind, the girls carefully remained in the tent until they had passed. This aroused no comment on the part of Jarlo or the old Tibetan guide. It often happened that when girls elected to take the holy yet vastly alluring pilgrimage to Lhasa—an adventure filled with all the magic of the unknown—their kinfolk, confronted with the prospect of losing much-needed help with the working of the family fields, did all in their power to oppose and hinder them. Yet later when Jarlo and the girl of superior beauty, who was

called Drolmatso, wandered off to drive back the straying oxen, and then sat together on the hillside through the pleasant hours of a sunny afternoon, the other pilgrim's brow was wrinkled with a touch of worry: there are other things beside family opposition and duress that may hinder pilgrims on the way to Lhasa—Place Of Gods.

One more day's slow progress brought us to Duggur's encampment, and in the vast excitement of making camp and absorbing the hospitality of the two tents, the pilgrims were almost forgotten. Yet as members of our party they found welcome and shelter and also occupation. We intended to stay with the Samtsa tents for some time and the track of the pilgrim trail, bright green with a growth of new grass in the darker tangle of year-old hay, had no further interest for us. But the pilgrims still delayed their departure, begging scraps of leather from us with which to cobble their much-cobbled boots.

One evening as we were eating our supper—Duggur sampling new and untried foods with suspicious and yet childish glee—Jarlo pulled aside the tent flaps, sat down beside me and began a long and persuasive argument. Our movement, he said, among the Samtsa tents required a lot of fuel and wherever we stayed it meant a heavy burden on our hosts. Even here, with two tents to look after our needs, we were a heavy burden. Duggur and Troroma demurred at this but Jarlo continued the argument. Wouldn't it be best if we had a Tibetan woman to gather and prepare fuel: to gather up the fresh cow dung every morning, with her

hands spreading it thinly on the grass, and to rake up the dried chips before the afternoon thunderstorm? Then too, we could get a few cows and have much milk. In short (after elaborating at some length in a vein of considerable domesticity), wouldn't it be good to take on Drolmatso as an addition to the caravan? Having said all this, Jarlo, his dark lean face set off by big brown eyes and dazzling white teeth, waited for my decision.

I stalled, and a Tibetan proverb was the first thing I could think of. "But one doesn't even lead a dog for there must be an owner," I said to Jarlo. "Who is her family and where is her husband? Maybe she has an affair? And what about the pilgrimage to Lhasa?"

At that Duggur chuckled briefly and Troroma muttered "argyong" with an odd inflection. But Jarlo was already speaking earnestly and breathlessly: "That is all right. Her husband is dead and she lived on in the husband's home, but they are poor so were glad to see her leave on pilgrimage."

"They were glad to see her leave on pilgrimage?" Why then had she stayed in the tent when riders came up the trail, I wondered. My first uneasiness hardened into resolve. "No, Jarlo, we will buy no milch cows on this trip, and if our hosts can't keep us supplied with fuel we can buy it with thread and needles. That," I added with an attempt at being hardheaded, "will cost less than food for another mouth."

Jarlo's disappointment darkened his face like a cloud on a

bright and sunny day, but he forbore to beg. Instead, he asked for a length of red girdle cloth from the trade goods box to be charged against his wages and left the tent with Duggur. Troroma lingered for a moment.

"You are wise," she whispered. "Who knows where her home is?" And then she too hurried out. In the silence I could hear the retreating murmur of earnest conversation between Jarlo and Duggur.

The day had been hot but the tent flaps were already stiff with frost. It was time to turn in for a warm sleep. Again the flaps parted and Drolmatso's companion slipped inside with her finger on her lips. We all listened intently but could hear nothing other than the labored breathing of the tethered oxen as, hugely distended, they shifted to bring up their cuds.

"Thank you for all—shelter—food—leather. Tomorrow I am going on with some travelers who go to Lhamo." The girl paused hesitantly. Her rather serious face was clouded with a slight frown and her brown young shoulders heaved.

"Doesn't Drolmatso go with you?" I questioned.

Again she listened intently. "I don't know," she said at last. "But why should I let you get into trouble? You fed us all the way. Drolmatso has three husbands alive and one man was killed because of her. The flesh of many men burns for her. That is all right but affairs (feuds) follow. Now you know," she finished, and again listened intently. Evidently she was satisfied, and, holding the stiffening tent flaps apart, she slipped out.

I waited a sufficient interval and then hailed the cook tent where the boys held high carnival. "Be sure and fill the tsamba and cheese bags of the pilgrims," I called. "Why should they be hungry when they go on argyong?"

Above a sudden confusion of voices came the caravan leader's answer: "All right, chief."

But the next day as I wandered into Duggur's tent to have a forenoon bowl of tea, Drolmatso, wearing a new red girdle and smiling a very pleasant smile, poured my tea and then went on with the churning. Duggur grinned at my amazement and, pointing his chubby finger, chuckled: "The dog has found a new master," he said. "Drolmatso, go out and drive back the flock of ewes for the noon milking. Yes, good one, drive them back."

After she was well out of earshot I expostulated faintly and then told the tale of the three live husbands and the one dead one, and about the feuds that followed a young woman with a way about her. But the old man merely laughed.

"She didn't want to go to Lhasa," said he, "and I needed someone to help with the sheep. She was at my tent door. I couldn't send her away. And as for trouble: by the body of the Buddha, who will make trouble for me? For you, a foreigner, maybe. Or for Jarlo, the little farmer boy. But not for me. In the fall when Jarlo stays with us to watch your winter herd she will be his wife. But you needn't worry: it is all on my head. And who fears a little trouble anyway? Things have now been quiet for a long time."

To change the subject he proceeded to show me the clips

of ammunition he had recently purchased for his Belgian Mauser.

Troroma, however, looked a little worried.

"It might mean trouble in the winter encampment and that wouldn't be pleasant," she said and glanced shrewdly at Duggur. "Anyway, you wouldn't have hired her if she hadn't been pretty."

At this Duggur looked a little self-conscious and winked at me. Then we all three turned to look out under the raised wall of the tent. Out where the ewes were feeding, Jarlo and Drolmatso stood talking. He had evidently been helping her round up the sheep and protecting her from the dogs. There was a sudden playful tussle and a flash of red as Jarlo stuffed something inside his coat. Then he stalked off about his business. When I turned Troroma was watching Duggur with an amused smile.

She said to me: "Jarlo will watch the horses well tonight. They were restless last night—maybe someone was bothering them."

A cloudless day changed to a twilight of purple and gold. All around, the black tents slowly melted into the night to re-emerge as a ring of dark monsters with glowing insides where supper fires began to burn more brightly. From within that ring sounded shouting and hulloing as the cattle and horses were tethered and hobbled. The women of the encampment, milking pails in their hands, stalked the temperamental yak cows with whispered endearments and mild cursing. In the midst of the turmoil Jarlo stalked and caught

horse after horse of our none too gentle string, bringing them to the chain tether line with its metal anklets and clanking padlocks. Only Ngoncha, the big piebald, growing yet wilder with the freedom of the open country, evaded him for a time but finally allowed himself to be caught and brought to his place in the line, where an anklet was snapped on his pastern.

"Last night, chief, someone was near the horses. Tonight I had better sleep near them," Jarlo explained as he brought out his bedding roll and covered it with his big felt raincoat. The words had a vaguely familiar ring but I was in a hurry to reach the tent. The temperature had dropped forty degrees in less than two hours and was still falling. Again the tent would be stiff with frost.

Sometime in the night the clashing of the tether chain and the uneasy shifting and stamping of the horses awakened me. I threw back the tent flap. Was someone bothering the horses and if so where was Jarlo? But a throaty feminine chuckle punctuated the steady murmur of voices that came from near the snorting horses. The horses quieted, but the whispered murmuring went on. Sometimes Jarlo forgot and his laugh was enough to set Jamar growling with perplexity in spite of Drolmatso's quick soothing. Like a flash it all was clear. Drolmatso had come back to claim her girdle. In my memory I heard the echo of Troroma's words: "Jarlo will watch the horses well tonight."

So had ended a pilgrimage to Lhasa. Somewhere in the west at some other encampment along the pilgrim trail

Drolmatso's companion paused in the journey that Drolmatso herself would never take. A bit uneasily I remembered the one dead and three live husbands who also in a shadowy way seemed to camp on the pilgrim trail. But Duggur had said it was all on his head. I hoped so. Feeling sure that the horses would not be stolen, I went back to sleep.

V

The Shrine of the Mother Goddess

Along the path that led to our place in Taktsang Lhamo, the dust devils danced in rapid succession and the valley was filled with a gritty, swiftly moving cloud hundreds of feet high. The winter air was bitter and the trails were thick with dust that lay ready to respond to the whims of the restless wind. Then under that cloud, and between the dust devils, another whirl of dust raised by the quick beat of horses' hooves billowed along the back trail. Guests were coming and the big gate was opened to let the riders in.

There were five of them; old Ama Doko, her daughter Wotrug, Nama the daughter-in-law, and two companions—a servant from the big tent and a friend to help him take the horses back to the encampment. The women folk were going to stay with us, announced Ama Doko, as she carefully dipped her fingers in the melted butter on top of her bowl of tea and greased her wind-roughened, dust-grimed face. Wotrug and Nama merely grinned. They were completely satisfied that they were to visit in Lhamo for a month.

All the news they brought was good. Jarlo, our servant, was well and my horses and cattle were keeping their flesh in the winter pastures near Duggur's encampment. Duggur himself was well. In fact, everyone was well except the three arrivals, and each one of them had pains and aches—some vague, some specific. Wotrug, folding her hands where it hurt, complained in a girlish alto that she had eaten too much fat meat. All three women hoped to get doses of foreign medicine to make them feel better.

Then too there was the matter of *Gora*. Gora consists of a clockwise circumambulation of shrines and temples, and is the approved way to make progress through the many states and cycles of Lamaism. It was now the slack season in the cattle pens, Ama Doko said, and there was little milking and no buttermaking to take up the time. Rather than spend the short winter days merely sitting by the fire they had decided to visit us and perform the ritual circling of the shrine of Tengri, the mother goddess whose worship has a special place in the hearts of Tibetan women folk.

In the midst of this spirited discussion Ama Doko seemed to sense a question I had been trying to ask. "That pilgrim," she said, "the one who would go to Lhasa on argyong but became Jarlo's wife instead. The one Abba Duggur used as help in the little tent. Yes, she is a very good wife for Jarlo. She works on the ropes and pack saddles, Jarlo is happy and your work is being done. . . ." She hesitated slightly and then muttered: "The small tent—what if trouble did come to the small tent? It was not the big tent's affair. Three husbands

should be enough for any woman. Why should Jarlo be the fourth?"

Ama Doko's words intensified the worry that had lingered in my mind since the night I discovered Drolmatso with Jarlo and the horses. The news that Jarlo had actually taken the girl as his wife was disquieting. Because they lived in a hut near the small tent they were both in a special sense under the patronage of Duggur. For all the reassurance that Ama Doko brought, I sensed there lurked in her shrewd suspicious mind, steeped in the feud tradition of the Tibetans, the dim foreboding ghost of trouble to come. I also detected a hint of malicious satisfaction, for she realized that if it did come, the small tent would probably bear the brunt.

The shrine of the mother goddess, Tengri, is on the very fringe of the Sechu lamasery. Within its bounds are many holy places and shrines; great idol houses; chanting halls and *chortdens* (offering towers). But the women folk prefer, of all these holy places, the shrine of Tengri. Seldom do they see her, however. Except on very special occasions the doors are barred, yet they know she is within, and so go the rounds; circling the little red and white shrine and stopping at the door to bow and rub their foreheads against the stone that marks the center of the threshold. The valley may be filled with dust clouds, and dust devils may dance on the ridge, but the shrine of Tengri sits within sheltering junipers, its back is to the hill folded around it, and its face toward the winter sun.

The three pilgrims came back from their long walks on

the sacred Gora path, feeling better each day. At night Wotrug and Nama took sips of foreign medicine until Wotrug forgot where it was that she hurt and Nama proclaimed herself well. They thanked both the medicine and the merit acquired on the path around the shrine of Tengri. The medicine's help was problematic, I thought, but long and pleasant walks in the open air unquestionably benefited all three.

And furthermore, the shrine of Tengri was a pleasant spot in the winter sunshine. Old acquaintances had a way of meeting on the path, and even if enemies were to meet they could at least satisfy a mutual curiosity while the Tibetan consequences of such a meeting were held in abeyance. Gossip and news circulated constantly there, and in the hearing and telling of that news, mixed with flirtation and merriment, the wanderers on the Gora path sometimes forgot to pray and tell their beads; only their feet carried on the work of accumulating merit while their tongues and hands were otherwise engaged.

Ama Doko knew almost everyone she met on the path, but sometimes even the news and gossip to be found near the shrine of Tengri could not satisfy her prying, suspicious mind. The sight of a stranger would send her scurrying to the lamasery where she visited friends and picked up further obscure and delectable tidbits of rumor and information. Once I met her in Stretch Ears Jamtzen's place. Their expressions as I came up the steps of the house made me think that my name had had a place in their conversation.

On the day before Jarlo was to bring in four of our horses for winter stabling and special feeding, Ama Doko hailed me in the lanes of the lamasery and insisted that she had important words to say. I followed her to a point on the hill where no listeners could come upon us unaware, and there, like the ill-omened birds that perch on such lonely lookouts, we went into a huddle.

Her conversation had never, since I had known her, gone straight to the point; it tacked and veered all around the subject; but that afternoon, in the long minutes she muttered and mumbled, it seemed to me there was no subject at all. What I heard was simply a vague jumble of suspicions.

"There is trouble in the wind," she said. "Jamtzen knows about it." The Tebus (some tribes from the Tebu Valley) were bad, they were buying information. Wasn't I afraid? Was Jarlo coming the next day with the horses? Jarlo, Drolmatso, the Tebus. A bad place to meet . . .

On went the muttering while her shrewd old eyes watched my face. Her words flowed aimlessly yet with a turgid rush of purpose. Suddenly two thoughts were clear in my mind, although I could not have told just what my ears had heard: Jarlo was bringing my horses the next day. And the Tebus would be waiting for Jarlo, not for my horses.

It still didn't make sense but I came down from my perch on the hill in a hurry. I instructed my caravan leader to set out that night with a companion, reach the encampment before daylight and tell Jarlo to remain there, letting them bring the horses to me. When the two returned late the next afternoon they had quite a story to tell. Seven men had

stopped them at a narrow place in the trail as they came down the hill, and recognizing Ngoncha, my big piebald, had asked for Jarlo. Jarlo, they had been told, wasn't coming and wouldn't be coming for a long time.

"Take the foreigner's horses and go on. Some of us are friends of his. We want Jarlo," the seven had said, and let my men and horses through the pass.

No one knew just who these Tebus were but I was sure that at least one of the three live husbands of Drolmatso was in the band. Eventually I would have to do something to clear myself of the mess, but just then all I could think of was to let Jarlo stay in Duggur's winter encampment.

The three Gora-path walkers had been having the joys of a vacation, a visit to the city, and the consolation of religion combined with the medical attention of a sanatorium; they now went to the shrine of Tengri somewhat more warily than formerly. Later, as rumors thickened, we took to escorting them the two hundred yards or so that lay between our gate and the Gora path. Safely arrived there, they went on with their praying and visiting until we should come for them in the early afternoon.

The shrine of Tengri was a pleasant place no longer. Suspicion and distrust darkened the winter sunshine and winds of fear sifted through the juniper trees to blow on the three pilgrims. By day Ama Doko collected rumors and retold them all over the evening tea. Seven men, she said, intent on their own purposes, shifted camp throughout the countryside to avoid identification, but every night Ama

Doko could tell us just where the men had camped the night before, and in what valley they had set up their noonday kettle-stones.

One day a swirling cloud crowded the dust devils off the trail. Presently horsemen and horses poured in through our big gate. The three Gora pilgrims must have known what that cloud meant for they arrived immediately after. One of the two new arrivals turned out to be Duggur's son Dorlo; the other, leading three spare horses, was the servant of the big tent. But I recognized neither the horses nor the rifles that they carried. Nor did Ama Doko, whose wonderment was fierce, vocal and somewhat profane as she questioned the men who sat down by the guest room fire.

The tale they told was the kind a Tibetan loves to tell. Just as Ama Doko had mysteriously known where the seven moved, so in Duggur's encampment all were aware that seven men lay in wait for Jarlo and moved around the countryside, camping each night in a different hollow. Because of this knowledge and under orders from Duggur, the few families in his small encampment stayed hidden in the winter huts all day long. Thus to watchful eyes the camp would seem deserted except for the women going about their chores in the cattle pens.

To the seven men, when they finally rode in from the valley, crossed the stream and pulled up at the encampment shouting for Duggur, its few huts and the cattle pens from which the women scurried must have seemed already theirs. The jingling of their accoutrements and the stamping of their

horses' hooves on the frozen ground must have made their own might seem like that of an army. Duggur appeared and faced them calmly. However, they interpreted his quiet words as an overt admission of fear.

Utterly assured, the men demanded that Jarlo come out and settle with them. Duggur stood impassively. Then they demanded that Drolmatso be turned over to them that they might do what they pleased with her. From their remarks her day seemed to have come. Duggur replied that she had come to him by the open road of her own free will and so should only go the open road of her own free will. At this the young men twisted their sword handles, following Duggur with threatening gestures and ill-chosen words as he gave way before them and drew back through the lanes and cattle pens of the encampment.

At this point in the tale Ama Doko began to swear guttural oaths in an oddly preoccupied manner but Wotrug cried out, asking if Abba Duggur had been hurt.

The narrator—the servant of the big tent—grinned with keen relish of the sensation he was creating. He shook his head and went on with the story, his hand unconsciously shifting to his sword handle as he told of seven hotheaded young men browbeating with increasing arrogance one old man. Until the last word was said, and then men from every hut in Duggur's encampment poured into the cattle pen to seize the young braves before they could use their rifles or even pull the long blades loose from the scabbards in their girdles!

"Some of them were brave sons and we had to use our own swords a little—Drolmatso's husband is a wild one," finished the teller. He gave his sword handle one final suggestive twist. "And now," said he, "we have six captives, seven horses with all their saddle gear, five rifles, and a number of swords and spears. Only six men were held; one was sent home on foot to tell the Tebus the trouble they had gotten into. Jarlo's affair is a good one and now it is Duggur's and ours. We'll milk this cow dry."

I realized now where the strange horses and rifles came from. Whatever the terms of the final settlement might be, for the moment the rifles and horses were in the hands of Duggur and he and his men would no doubt use them exclusively, for it seems to give a Tibetan peculiar pleasure to ride the flesh off someone else's horse and use up someone else's ammunition.

The room hummed with excited comment that died away as Ama Doko began to swear. "Thunderbolts of hell!" made a good beginning but the end was a long time in coming. As her vocabulary began to fail, fragmentary sentences expressed her grievance. "It is Duggur's affair. He took in the dog without a master. He liked her and kept her, the woman with many husbands. Jarlo's wife is not my wife—does he now think she is pretty? Let them fight, all of them. It is the affair of the small tent. I am doing Gora. I stay."

But for once even her imperiousness had little effect on anyone. Nama was already packing their stuff; all the extra butter and cheese that was to have lasted them for a month;

and Wotrug whimpered: "Abba Duggur will scold, Abba Duggur will scold."

Yet it was not fear of Duggur's scolding that sent Ama Doko off with the others but the fact that war existed between her husband's encampment and the Tebus. No one was safe any more. Even the path of Gora—pleasant strolling within the sacred influence of Tengri the mother—had become a dangerous venture. The feud tradition that held six more or less wounded men in close captivity until the affair was settled made every place a place of menace. The sunlit hollow where the red and white shrine called to worship and prayers was empty, for the winds of fear had sifted through the sheltering junipers to blow upon the three Gora pilgrims. Dust devils danced along the ridge behind the cloud their horses hooves had raised, and Ama Doko and the others drove the Tebus' horses at the fastest pace the trail allowed on the homeward journey.

VI

When a Man Dies

The dawn came from behind; first changing the black to gray and then, as the promise of the sun brightened in the east, sending our shadows scouting down the trail ahead of us. I felt considerably relieved when I could see my companion behind me as I turned to speak. But his gaze and interest seemed far off to one side of the trail. Then he spoke urgently: "Gazelle, Aku Sherab Dzondri. It would be fine to have meat."

It wasn't a hard stalk that he pointed out but I hesitated, for I had a rather odd companion. My three Gora guests had barely disappeared down the trail to Duggur's encampment, when I decided to ride there myself, send Jarlo back to his village and thereby clear myself of responsibility in the affair which had arisen over his wife. None of my own men or my friends in Lhamo had been free to ride with me. My caravan leader had been appalled at my suggestion that I make the day's ride alone. When I consulted Stretch Ears Jamtzen his grim face showed faint approval at my

daring, yet even he ruled against it and, like one giving a primer lesson to a child, laid down the axiom: "No one in Tibet rides alone."

So they had gone to get a companion for me and returned to announce that they had engaged Shartrug. He was known as a good man with a rifle and a good man on the trail. But that had not been all. Half apologetically they further suggested that I keep my eyes on Shartrug; never let him have his hands on both rifles or let mine be out of my hands or off my back. He was, they informed me, a famous robber, and only a few months before had murdered a travel companion under peculiar circumstances. Even Tibetans shook their heads and said "Not good, not good." Not that he wasn't all right as a guide and companion. Oh quite, and the fact that Stretch Ears had been party to hiring him was a further guarantee that it would be all right. Still, it was well to "act with a small heart."

Thus, for me, the two hours before dawn as Shartrug and I rode the rough trail to Samtsa had been filled with dark moments of suspicion. Even now in the regained assurance that followed the dawn, his suggestion that I stalk the gazelle renewed my suspicions. The gazelle were sure to be in excellent condition, I reasoned, and a nice fat buck would make our arrival at Duggur's winterquarters doubly welcome. But it was the itching of my trigger finger that really prevailed and I crept away on the stalk, looking back occasionally to keep my eye on Shartrug as I had been told to do. Precaution flew to the winds when I sighted a handsome

buck through the tangled winter grass. I took him with one shot. When I looked back, Shartrug stood on the trail obediently holding the horse. So that was all right. It was not far now to Duggur's tents. Duggur's welcome was all that a Tibetan welcome should be and the three women folk plied us with the utmost of Tibetan hospitality—for had they not been our guests only a short time before? The sight of the fat buck brought an added smile to Duggur's face. When its heart and liver were served steaming hot on a platter Jarlo, Drolmatso his wife, Duggur and I took up the matter for which I had come.

Jarlo, for all his many excellencies, was no longer any good as a servant. As party to a feud, all roads were for him roads of danger and many were entirely closed. Most regretfully—for he had been a good servant—we settled up our affairs and Jarlo withdrew to prepare for his journey home to the farming country from which he had come. There he would be comparatively safe. Drolmatso too was going, but whether with him or somewhere else no one cared to ask. Wherever she went the threat of multiple vengeful husbands qualified her charm and good looks.

Duggur and I remained with the platter between us. I wanted to say, "I told you so," but refrained and only *looked* it.

Duggur grinned and shook his head. "You were right, Sherab," his voice held a note of amusement, "when you talked about Drolmatso's husbands and affairs but you were wrong when you said it would be bad. It is handsome ad-

vantage—yes, good fortune—instead. See what is in my hand?" He stretched out his pudgy, grimed hand with the strong fingers and surprisingly shapely nails to turn it in a gesture of truly Tibetan grace.

"Six men, five rifles, seven horses and odds and ends," he said. "And because they twisted their sword handles at me in my own front yard, and took away my 'face,' before I let rifles, men and horses go I will have five shoes of silver (fifty ounces each) and a good rifle, the best of the five, as apology indemnity. And fifty ounces of silver for the men of the encampment for the expense incurred in coming to my rescue. The horses of the Tebus are well fleshed, so the longer settlement is delayed the longer we can ride them and save our own. It is truly a good affair!"

Duggur half hesitated and then went on: "But if you wish, it can still be your affair too. You can say that because your servant was here, it was the same as though you had been here. So for the smart on your face we will ask another rifle and five shoes of silver for you. It is a good affair for both of us."

I became aware that Shartrug, who sat across the fire from us drinking his tea in silence, was watching me with the utmost intentness. But no recognizable expression of either approval or disapproval showed in his dark, scarred face as I refused any part in the affair even to the profit of a rifle and five shoes of silver. When I left to visit the captives and treat the wounded, Shartrug was still drinking his tea.

Duggur accepted my decision with resignation. I think he

had rather expected it and evidently felt that it gave him a free hand in making plans for the future.

"It is my affair—on my head only," he reiterated as we went toward the well-guarded hut where the captives were chained. He paused at the door and urged: "Wash the wounds well and put good medicine on them. I don't want my captives to die. They are wealth to me."

None of the men seemed badly hurt; there were scalp wounds, a split ear, over which the owner was greatly concerned lest it would not grow together and the women would laugh at him, and one man had a shoulder gash. Only one head wound caused me any concern; it seemed deep, down to the bone and more. But the owner laughed with the others as I swabbed and sewed, using iodine liberally. My great surprise was to find that one of the group was the son of Atang, a Tebu friend of mine. More than ever I was glad that the situation was none of my concern and not my affair.

When Duggur had assured himself that I was doing a good job on his captives he went out, leaving me alone with the prisoners. Atang's son hastened to tell me that though they lived in fear of beating, punishment and maybe even death if settlement were not made, yet so far they were being treated well for captives. Above all they hoped that soon their comrade who had been released would bring men to Lhamo to arrange through the mediative services of the monks for the payment of indemnity. And then I found out why Duggur, the canny old Tibetan, had left me alone with

the captives: they begged me to send further word to their own people not to delay or haggle over paying the price demanded for they were afraid of being beaten and tortured.

"By the Books," pleaded Atang's son, his bravado quite gone, "the Samtsa people are very fierce."

Duggur had indeed laid his plans well.

It was still early in the day. Everything for which I had come had been accomplished and so Shartrug and I started for home. As we rode, Shartrug, the man with a past that people whispered about, suddenly became confidential, riding close at my bridle hand. I quickly placed my other hand on my Luger.

"Akku Sherab Dzondri," he averred, "you did well to let it remain Abba Duggur's affair. Even a good affair that is handsome advantage may yet go bad, and if someone dies it is finished. The affairs that come when a man dies are bad ones. We Tibetans have too many affairs."

What was troubling him? I wondered. His horse dropped behind mine and I began to feel uneasy. Finally I decided to take a short cut home, and asked him to ride ahead to show me the way although I had ridden it many times before and knew every turn of the trail.

In Lhamo some days later I happened to be in Stretch Ear's house. Shartrug was there too, repairing pack saddles, for he was a good worker and handy. Suddenly he stopped his task and called us out on the roof to look at a large party that was coming up the winding valley trail from Tebu country.

"It must be the Tebus coming to settle the affair and make payment," I thought, remembering that the officials of Gurdu lamasery had been arbitrating the matter for days. It was now generally believed that all the details were nearly settled. According to the Tibetan way of looking at the matter there were no complications at all. Duggur had all the advantage and a good case. It was merely a matter of determining how much the wound to his dignity was really worth; how much he must be paid for having had armed men ride up and beard him at his own door. This agreed, all that remained was to arrange the manner of payment and call quits to the whole affair.

As the long line drew nearer up the valley trail, I remembered that Atang would be one of those coming to make payment, and hurried home to prepare for guests. But I found one already there. Atang's own black horse was tied in the courtyard and his rider, the servant from Duggur's big tent, was drinking tea in the guest room. He grinned impishly as I entered and waved his hand toward the horse outside and the rifle stacked at the door.

"Abba Duggur has sent word to the men who talk the affair. He knows that the longer they delay the longer I ride that horse and carry that rifle. Both are good. Just right for a brave like me."

He gave a hitch to the already slightly drawn blade in his girdle and then went on drinking his tea. I knew that he was generally credited with being the one who dealt most of the wounds in the melee when the Tebus were seized. And now here he was riding Atang's black horse, which would be

recognizable to its owner from almost any distance. So I did not in the least detain him when he announced that he must hurry, giving him a final warning that the valley road was bad and he must be sure and go by the pass. I was relieved to see him ride over the brow of the hill. He was gone, by way of the pass, and would not meet Atang. No impending settlement or power on earth could have prevented trouble if Atang had met someone riding his horse. And yet no one could say I had given him information about his enemies. I was still neutral in the affair.

And it was as a neutral that I talked with Atang when he later arrived. It seemed to me that he worried almost as much about his black horse as about his son.

"These steppe dwellers," he complained, "do not feed their horses well in the winter and they'll ride a good horse to death."

I assured him that the last time I had seen his horse it looked very well and then went on to inquire about the progress of the affair. It was as I had expected: a settlement had been reached and the Tebus had arrived to make payment and conclude the giving of pledges and awarding of the arbitrators. In fact that very night they would deposit the payment agreed upon with the middle men, and messengers had already gone to Samtsa to arrange for the liberation of the captives from Duggur's encampment. After being brought to Lhamo they were to go home and recuperate from the hardships of a captive's life, although Atang admitted that their treatment had been good.

"We pay the indemnity," he explained, "because our young men were wild and foolish; fools and idiots to go to the door of a wise one like Duggur in the way they did. We pay because no one has been killed, and after we have paid and opened our mouths agreeing to the settlement, there will be no more affair. All will be over. It is Tibetan custom. But it is not because we are afraid of Samtsa. We live in the 'Stone Box.' No men can get in or out of our valley unless we let them. But Duggur's encampment is in open country, like the palm of my hand. We could burn all their pasture in a single night and they would never know who did it. Since my son was taken I have been within rifle shot of the encampment and no one knew. Yet no one has died—it is only an affair of wealth." He drank his tea reflectively and again asked about his black horse.

I saw the captives when they arrived. Most of them were quite well and I took stitches out of fairly well-healed wounds. All but one, whose deep head wound was a fountain of pus, and the man himself had a sick, unhealthy color. He laughed and jested with the others, but I noticed that he did not eat. The captives went home the next day; the final settlement was some time off, for the Samtsa men were delayed in their coming. Atang, however, was perfectly happy. His horse was back and not too thin in spite of the way it had been ridden. Because of this good fortune, when the Samtsa party finally arrived Atang and Duggur met in my guest room more like friends than enemies. Though the concluding ceremonies which would end the affair had not yet

been performed, payment was already in the hands of the arbitrators. The rest was mere form.

"Tomorrow we meet," said Atang, eyeing Duggur with interest and respect; he then left to rejoin his party in the Gurdu lamasery.

Duggur relaxed in the comfort of the guest room with a sense of perfect well-being. As a result of his shrewdness he was collecting five shoes of silver (two hundred and fifty ounces) and a rifle, and when it was all received, words would be said and then there would no longer be an affair. No wonder he teased me a little for letting such an opportunity as had been mine slip by; letting the affair belong to him alone.

But just at sunset Shartrug burst in. He fairly exuded excitement, and it seemed to me that some deep inner satisfaction was in his expression as he announced breathlessly: "The Tebus are all leaving!"

The guest room emptied in a moment and we rushed to where we could see the river road. A long file of mounted men rode swiftly down the trail; at the head moved a big black horse we all recognized. Excited questionings rose around us and the servant of Duggur's big tent muttered, half in my ear, half to himself, "A good horse!" There was intense longing in his tone.

Payment had not been made, the final words had not been said, all had not met to agree formally that they might part with no affair, and yet the Tebus were leaving. A foreshadowing of trouble darkened our spirits as the twilight

deepened while the mountains seemed to rise to block off the afterglow. And then a monk hurrying to us from across the stream brought confirmation of the worst.

"One of the wounded men has died!" he shouted as he drew near.

A half-choking intake of breath went through the Samtsa party like a sudden breeze, followed by the question, "Payment?"

There was a vibrant silence as the monk paused to catch his breath, then:

"The payment is still in our hands and we can give it to you now, but the Tebus will not call the affair settled. A man has died so it is now their affair, they say."

Duggur's shoulders drooped as he turned back toward the guest room.

"Dorlo," he said sadly, "go and get the payment while we saddle the horses." And to me: "No, Sherab, we can't stay. We must get back to the encampment tonight. I was afraid the young men struck too much and too hard with their swords."

In an astonishingly short time the party filed out the gate, every man carrying his rifle on the front of his saddle. Life in Duggur's encampment would be a matter of alarms and sleepless nights for the rest of the winter. Even when the summer came and they moved too far away to expect attack, their winter huts would be almost sure to be burned unless Duggur's people could secure advance information and ambush the Tebus. Even the women would be in fear as

they went to the stream for water. Unlike the steppe Tibetans, the Tebus of the valley will even attack and kill women in their raiding.

"This, too, is my affair," muttered Duggur as his was the last horse through the gate. Then he was gone, riding through the darkening twilight.

Shartrug spoke, and I turned with a start to see him close beside me. "When a man dies the affair has no end: settlement is out of the question," he said. "We Tibetans have too many affairs."

His darkly pondering face was more mysterious than ever. I later heard it rumored that he was the one who first sold the information to the Tebus that Jarlo was bringing my horses on a certain day. Still later I heard he was riding as a scout for the Tebus in their plot against Duggur's encampment. Possibly those rumors were current merely because of his reputation, and had no foundation in fact. In his secretive way he seemed to have attached himself to my concerns, and in spite of myself I felt half inclined to trust him. I even hired him once or twice to ride with me as my companion.

Maybe it was some dark half-stirring of regret that brought those words to the surface as we stood together and watched Duggur ride away through a wintry dusk, carrying the burden of an affair that was strictly his own.

VII

The Night of the Butter Images

The day was done, but its excitement still lingered in the faces and voices of our guests. Each talked of something different but, despite the weariness that rested on them all, a glow of satisfaction, triumph and released spirits shone undimmed. The Wishing Prayer festival of the First Moon had just been celebrated with all its customary display and pomp. The religious pageant, or play—partly allegorical, partly historical—often called "the devil dance," had moved slowly under the high sun; slowly enough to give Duggur time to go aside with cronies and talk about feuds, trade and the price of horses. And there was time for Dorlo to find ammunition for his rifle and compare the breadth of leopard-fur collars with other young braves. Wrinkled Ama Doko and the younger Troroma had time even to shop for womens' finery and take notice of changing styles in ornaments and girdles. But all of them had now come back to the lamasery square where the crowds darkened under dust and the afternoon sun.

They had come to see the final fixing of the curse, to hear

the last incantation of the whirling Black Hats, and to join in the general great shout when all sin and disaster of the year were finally vanquished and destroyed. In the deepening dusk, sprinkled with the flash of rifles and the dancing of firebrands, they cheered the making of the sacred bonfire in which retribution and disaster were burned, and they yelled madly against the heavy irregular roll of gunfire until it was time to come back to our guest room, to sit and eat, wearily wiping the dust from their faces as they told us of all these things. The solemnity of the untried year was broken and they were again free of the curse. No wonder they talked like children let out of school.

Only Wotrug was silent; yet Wotrug's face glowed the brightest of them all. Silence was an unusual thing from the seventeen-year-old daughter of the tent. Under the protection of Abba Duggur's special love and favor she had been accustomed to saying anything she pleased; often peering past his shoulder to see what effect her half-breathless impudence had on her listeners. Yet she frequently affected shyness, hiding her face as she talked in a husky alto with odd quavers in it. By Tibetan standards of feminine beauty—and they are rather high—she was no great beauty but better-looking than most. And there was impudence and temper in her eyes and throaty, changing voice. The twilight became night and the evening was far gone, but not once did she speak as she mixed her *tsamba* with butter and cheese and drank her tea.

We had known her since the day when her hair was

short, its ends a fringe around her face. At that time she dressed like a boy, tagging us to the stream and flinging stones at the dogs to protect us. Indeed, her noisy romping and rough manners made her seem more boy than girl. But now she had come to Lhamo for the festival, dressed in all the cumbersome finery of a grown woman, her face partly hidden under the one hundred and eight braids of a Tibetan woman's coiffure.

That very morning she and Nama, her sister-in-law, had spent much time and thought on the set of the sleeves and collars of their brocade jackets and the tying of additional girdles. Ordinarily one girdle of coarse, dark red silk was enough, but for festival attire others were added—purple, green, orange—until the silken ends waved like banners as the girls moved. They had helped each other arrange all this to the best advantage. It was, therefore, not surprising that Nama should be the first to notice that the green girdle Wotrug had worn, together with the silver-bound Mongolian case knife that hung from it, were missing.

Now, for the first time during the evening Wotrug spoke and there were odd quavers in her lilting voice: "Oh, the green girdle and knife I forgot and left at Chayak's when we were there for the noon tea. His daughter wanted to see the figures of the green silk so I took it off. Yes, it is there. I'll get it before we start for home. By the Books, how did I forget it?" Her braids had pulled straight down over her face but her eyes behind this convenient screen shifted from old Duggur to Ama Doko.

"Ama," she said, "you please remind me about them tomorrow."

Evening prayers were said after supper and more prayers followed. The night wore on with much hilarity and good fellowship. Duggur didn't get drunk, contrary to his intention, for at the insistence of Troroma I finally managed to sneak away the jug of Tebu whiskey given him by some cronies. But he was content with good food and a fresh supply of American magazines to look at. The vagaries of American magazine advertising were a source of perennial amazement to our Tibetan friends. They were frequently shocked at the pictures of men and woman kissing and the scantily clad models in the lingerie ads. Duggur's face registered alternate shock and delight as he leafed the pages.

Once Wotrug made a move to leave the circle but the old man ordered briefly, "Stay!" She stayed but her mouth drooped petulantly. We were solicitously putting our guests to bed, according to Tibetan good manners, when he suddenly asked whether the compound gate was locked and then ordered solemnly: "You lock it and keep the key yourself. Let no one out."

"What a lot he got out of the jug!" I thought.

The Festival of the Butter Images came the next evening but the intensity and hysteria of the Wishing Prayer were lacking. Only at dusk did any rumor ripple the breathing-spell calm of the day. The long-standing feud between the Samtsa and the Rzakdumba—tacitly held in abeyance during the festival season—had flared in a fierce exchange of

words and threats between hot-tempered young braves. Because Gurdu lamasery, where the Butter Images Festival was held, opened on the trails leading to the Rzakdumba encampments, the Samtsa chief, fearful of trouble, issued orders that no one of the Samtsa tribe was to cross the stream after dark. It meant that not one of Samtsa would see the Butter Images. Naturally there was much grumbling and discontent among the younger element, but a guard of armed men kept watch at the bridge head, inspecting all who would cross.

Leaders of Samtsa hurriedly called the rolls of their parties. We had been making arrangements with a number of local friends to see the sights and only as we were leaving did someone announce that Duggur couldn't locate Wotrug. She could easily have been at the trading post on our side of the stream so we thought no more of it and went our way, a compact group with our hands on our sword handles, going to see the sights.

The dusk, rapidly changing to black night, was full of an unusual stir. Ordinarily any movement or noise was likely to be fired upon from trading post or village. Honest men stayed at home after nightfall. Yet as we moved cautiously toward the lamasery square, the open spaces around the lamasery and the lanes within were full of bustle: people watchful, curious and alert like ourselves drew near and passed on. Tipsy laughter sounded down the lamasery alleys and parties of revelers shouted and challenged one another. The flares and lights around the great chanting hall cut the

night into a patch-quilt pattern of darkness and murky light. In the coverts of that pattern, under the walls of idol houses and cloisters, men and women went arm in arm seeking dark corners and combing the trading post and villages for sleeping places. Bevies of girls ran—not too fast—from young braves who shouted and jested with words as naked as unsheathed swords.

Even in the square, where beautiful multicolored images freshly sculptured in butter to represent the fantastic gods and demons of the Lamaist pantheon waited for incense and prayers, men and women crowded one another with Rabelaisian merriment. Again and again I recognized friends in the crowd—men and women who had welcomed us into their tents. But now, although they generally seemed to have the wrong partners they hailed us unabashed, with laughter and bantering advice. The seriousness of the Wishing Prayer was past, the breathless question about sin and the curse had been answered for the year and, relieved, a savage people of few inhibitions went their wild way, forgetting the negations of their creed.

Back at our guest room we found the Samtsa party in a state of considerable alarm. Wotrug had not returned. Because of Duggur's worry I even sent messengers to Chayak's house to ask about her. They found she hadn't been there since the day before and that no one knew anything about a green girdle and a case knife.

The silence that followed the report was broken by Troroma's faintly amused voice saying: "She has gone to find her girdle and the knife. She'll be back tomorrow."

A half-chuckle started somewhere in the circle but was checked as Duggur cursed quite fiercely.

"If she wanted to sleep with a man," he growled, "there are plenty. I would have found a good one for her. But why should she cross the stream when no one from Samtsa has crossed? Why should she visit the Butter Images when she knows the Rzakdumba braves have no fears and are liable to do anything? They'll steal all her ornaments and girdles and her brocade jacket--the little fool—the . . ."

Tibetan philosophy should have comforted him but he remembered a little tot he had carried on his horse and kissed and petted as she grew into attractive girlhood. And so the sound of distant revelry worried him.

In the morning when our Samtsa friends were packing their belongings, there was Wotrug, doing her share without particular comment from the rest of the group. Her green girdle was packed away with the others reserved for the holidays, but the big Mongolian case knife swung from her everyday girdle. She had returned with those belongings that had been given as a pledge. Whatever Duggur may have thought, we had heard no scolding. The incident was closed—or was it? Only the days of the new year could tell.

Weeks later I was called by my guest room keeper to face a stranger in my guest room. One of the handsomest young Tibetans I had ever seen waved his hand nonchalantly toward a leg of mutton; a gift covered with the scarf of felicity that is the polite gesture of every Tibetan social occasion. His tea had already been poured, so from the peg on the wall, where a number hung ready for use as re-

quired, I merely took another scarf and dropping it over both my hands, offered it to him. His silver-mounted rifle, silver-encrusted sword, leopard-fur collar and great fox-fur hat all marked the brave, and his smile and words were at once impudent yet oddly friendly, in a curious, inquiring way.

"You don't know me Sherab Dzondri—yes, Akku Sherab Dzondri—but I know you." He enjoyed the question that must have flashed in my eyes for he went on: "And still you don't know me. Oh yes, I have heard much about you and Dorje Mtso and Da-whay. Yes, from a woman at the time she likes to talk—when the night is dark and two are alone in a sleeping place. You are the great friend of Abba Dzopa Duggursjap—what a long name, we will call him Dzo-Dug. We both know him well."

With elaborate and aggravating deliberation he drew his pipe—orongo antelope horn trimmed with copper and chased silver—filled it, and finding a glowing pellet among the sheep manure embers in the ashbox of the stove, crushed it into the bowl, after which between puffs he again spoke.

"Still you don't know me? We saw you that night at the showing of the Butter Images, but Wotrug wouldn't let me call to you. She was afraid. Yes,"—sudden comprehension must have shown in my face—"I am the one who had the green silk girdle with the silver-mounted Mongolian case knife. Wotrug is a fine girl. Always now, my flesh yearns for her. But Dzo-Dug won't like me for a son-in-law. I am from Rzakdumba. I am poor."

Perhaps my eye flicked incredulously over the silver of his accoutrements, for he shook his head.

"Only a few cattle and sheep—our tent is a poor one though I am a brave son. Dzo-Dug would not like me well. By the Body of the Buddha, no!" For an instant his impudence had left him but returned as he added mockingly: "Isn't Wotrug a handsome one? From the way she talked I was afraid that you were handsome. But you are not. Too bad you have that hair and eyes—you might be. Well, I must go, but I live in Rzakdumba and my name is Tamba. Come and see me sometime, Sherab Dzondri, friend of Dzo-Dug, and we will be friends. Can you tell me where Wotrug is today? I know she likes me well."

I did not doubt that Duggur would not like him as a husband for his spoiled darling, but I wasn't so sure that it wouldn't be a good thing for Wotrug. There was a charm about Tamba that survived his outrageous impudence.

Some time later the rumor—first it was rumor and then became authenticated report—was current that Wotrug had fled her home and lived in the tent of Tamba of Rzakdumba. And it was also said that Duggur would not open his mouth. That meant trouble: a raid, an ambushment or something equally drastic. But before anything could happen, and before the moon had more than waxed and waned, Wotrug, we heard, was back home. Was it to stay or was it only to use her powers of persuasion on the old man? No one could tell.

Shortly after this the disastrous raid of the Rzakdumba on

the sheep camp of the tribe of Dzorge Nyinba took place. The Rzakdumba, instead of charging into a sleeping and unprepared camp, rode into an ambush composed of eleven well-armed men crouched in impromptu rifle pits at the edge of a spring-fed bog, open and well nigh impassable even in the wintertime. The Rzakdumba lost a number of men and returned home with a still greater number of wounded, among whom was Tamba. It was said he had distinguished himself with extreme bravery. I was called to treat some of the wounded but no one came from Tamba's tent to ask for my services. Simply as a matter of caution, I had made it a rule never to proffer my services without being asked. Therefore, I didn't go near him.

A few days later Dorlo arrived from Samtsa with an earnest plea from Duggur: there was a wounded man in Samtsa who needed what help I could give him. Dorlo seemed purposely secretive about who it was but urged my best and earliest attention, for Duggur would be greatly pleased. I set out immediately on the half-day's ride to Duggur's spring encampment and there in his big tent, while Wotrug watched and moaned solicitously, I did what I could for the badly shattered upper arm of Tamba himself.

His bravado and impudence had vanished. Pain darkened his good looks, yet he *was* a brave in the true Tibetan tradition as we worked pus and bone splinters from the wound, although he spoke sharply to Wotrug when he thought she loitered in bringing the hot water. Wotrug, too, had lost the trick of looking at people through the hundred and eight

braids of her hair. Once, when she started out of the tent with a rather raffish servant who always carried himself with a rather sporty air of privilege, Tamba called her back.

To Duggur's half-murmured protest that it was all right, he answered querulously—half in pain and half in very vigilant, un-Tibetan jealousy: "I know her better than you do. She is mine and need not look at any other man even if my arm is no good right now."

Wotrug turned back meekly without comment, and resumed her hold on the basin. She whimpered; watching me with an agonized look from which all coquettishness had gone.

So it was that in the first months of the year which had begun with the Wishing Prayer and the Festival of the Butter Images, Wotrug had grown to be a woman. She was no longer an old man's pampered pet.

Duggur grinned half shamefacedly as we talked later about the wound. I was sure, I told him, that at best Tamba's arm would be slightly stiff.

"Wotrug," he admitted, "cried day and night so what could we do? Her flesh yearned for him until it was pain. He lived in Rzakdumba and had only a poor tent but, after Wotrug heard he was wounded, she took him the word and we helped him get away with his herds while Rzakdumba moved to the spring encampment. Because Rzakdumba feared an ambush—they knew to whose tent he was fleeing—and after all he had fought well in the raid and was in pain, they let him go. Not much of a son-in-law for the big

tent of Dzopa Duggursjap of Samtsa, eh? But Wotrug. is happy, and after all he is a brave son. That is most important of all. That makes for good stock and brings one more good fighter to the Dzopa encampment."

VIII

The Pugilism of Jamtzen

As the noise of the arrival of a party of horsemen filled the compound, Stretch Ears Jamtzen's tawny eyes, with their peculiar gleam of ever ready suspicion, turned toward my guest room door. A minute before he had been examining, greatly amused, a set of boxing gloves, left by an exploration party, which had come by devious ways into my hands. Outside my custody they would likely have been regarded as merely a means for keeping the hands warm. Now, with a quick gesture, Stretch Ears dropped his inspection of such trivialities and, leaning far back in the shadows of the corner, watched Duggur, Troroma and Dorlo enter the room. Obviously they were strangers to him and his bleak angular face, with ears faintly suggestive of an interested elephant, was quite expressionless as he acknowledged my introduction.

All three greeted Stretch Ears with impeccable politeness yet I felt a certain degree of reserve. But the routine of Tibetan entertainment went on without a hitch: the

butter and cheese box went from hand to hand, the platter of sausages, composed of tallow, mutton or ox blood and lights and liver, was shared, and the big tea pot hovered over each bowl in rapid sequence as we slaked our thirst.

I was happy, for it was a meeting of special friends of mine—friends who indeed were the very best in the whole region—and under my carefree assumption that there was the utmost reason for mutual liking and respect, an air of cordiality rested on us as we noisily sipped tea and huddled somewhat closely around the little square stove that gave off an unfamiliar though by no means unappreciated degree of heat. Both Duggur and Stretch Ears commented to each other on the many aides to comfort their white friend possessed, but Dorlo, as he let his heavy sheepskin coat fall around his hips and turned arms and shoulders in the heat from the stove, noticed the boxing gloves lying where Stretch Ears had dropped them.

"Oh yes," said Dorlo, "he even has gloves to keep his hands warm. But now that he wears Tibetan clothes and isn't stingy of cloth, as when he wore the coats of the outlanders with such short sleeves, he really doesn't need gloves for his hands. He can keep them warm in his sleeves like we do."

But puzzlement grew as he turned the gloves over and tried them on. They seemed most strangely constructed for any purposes of warmth and so I hastened to explain; laying particular stress on the fun and play aspects of boxing. Dorlo's eyes flashed with quick interest but Duggur

and Stretch Ears both laughed with sudden amusement and the look that went between them was charged with the enjoyment of a privately shared joke. I had the impression of meanings which were eluding me.

Stretch Ears Jamtzen snorted something about Tibetans not playing at fisticuffs but hitting hard when they hit. On the impulse of the moment and stirred a bit by the hint of patronage in his tone I challenged him to a bout. For an instant his angular figure stiffened and then he picked up his tea.

"No," he said firmly. "I don't play at fisticuffs. When I hit I hit and affairs follow. I wouldn't want to hurt you," he jibed. And as he turned to Duggur I again had the sensation of having missed something.

Dorlo, however, was already putting on the gloves with the unmistakable intent of taking up the challenge. It wasn't in the least what I wanted, although he had proved his unfailing coolheadedness and good nature in all the incidents of Tibetan life which I had shared with him: vainly attempting to match him in throwing one hundred and twenty pound bags of grain on a frisky yak; roping the load with one hand while holding it up with a shoulder and the other. I knew the power of those magnificent shoulders and arms, that for all their coat of grime, grease, butter-shellacked soot and the deep unchanging tan of many scorching suns, would have done justice to a piece of statuary. I had hunted sheep with him among the crags and knew that for a man who spent over half his waking hours in the saddle he

was amazingly fast on his feet. Beneath his bulky coat, where he was knotting the sleeves to leave his arms free, I could see his waist, lithe and lean.

But there was no way to avoid the bout. We piled out into the yard, with Troroma giggling like a girl in anticipation of a surprise. I dropped into the conventional pose and Dorlo faced me, obviously puzzled just what to do with his left hand, while he prepared to knock me over the compound wall with his right.

Then I heard Duggur call out: "Dorlo, don't hit Sherab too hard. Just a little bit."

Dorlo, however, was deaf to such considerations of mercy. He evidently felt that he, too, knew me for a good sport and patently intended to hit me just as hard as the cushion on his good right hand would permit.

For a few seconds I ducked and sidestepped a succession of swings—any one of which would have done quite a bit of damage had it landed. I could hear Duggur and Troroma squealing like old grads at a football game. Dorlo had begun to puff from his efforts when I realized the comments from the sidelines had begun to change. Duggur had ceased cautioning Dorlo to hit "just a little." "Hit well, hit hard!" he begged, and between his puffing Dorlo swung again and again. Even such wild swings as those Dorlo threw at me may connect if the swinger devotes his entire attention to hitting and gives no care to his defense. Remembering this, I began shooting short, not too hard, but most disconcerting left jabs into Dorlo's face. As his head rocked

back time after time his expression of eager enthusiasm changed to puzzlement, pain, and finally to worry when his attack slowed up.

Again Duggur's voice carried advice to his son. The excited but canny old warrior had been the first to sense the strategy of the fight game with gloves.

"Don't hit around," he cried, "hold your arms straight and hit straight like Sherab does. Hit and protect your face with your left hand." But Dorlo with a good-natured grin dropped his arms and shook his head.

"It is a good way to learn to hit," he panted, "but Sherab runs too fast and his arms are too long."

He pulled off the gloves and rather ruefully felt one or two spots on his face. For my part I was glad to quit. Twelve thousand feet is no elevation at which to enter a foot race and my ducking and dodging had been just that. The contest was over now and we went back to the guest room for more tea.

Later, when Duggur's party followed my wife across the courtyard to our own living quarters to look at some recently arrived magazines, Stretch Ears and I were left alone in the guest room. He turned the gloves over and over. A smile, that seemed to spring both from the pleasantry of the moment and some well-remembered joke which he was tempted to share with me, sought an unfamiliar way across his grim face.

"You duck well, Sherab," he said. "And if you would hit hard like a Tibetan it would be very good, for you do not

miss. But when I hit with the fists all the monks in the lamasery run away. Your Samtsa friends know about that. Abba Duggur is a straightforward man. I would like him for a friend because my mind trusts him well. You ask him whether Jamtzen can hit well with the fist. Now I must go, for in a few days I leave for the border with my caravan and there are many pack saddles to be repaired. But tomorrow I shall invite your Samtsa friends to my house for tea and meat. Your friends are mine."

That night at supper I asked Duggur what he knew about Stretch Ears' fist fighting. Troroma and Dorlo laughed, but Duggur, with just a hint of worry in his voice, began the story of Stretch Ears Jamtzen's fisticuffs.

Stretch Ears, as everyone knew, said the old man, was leader of the lamasery troops. Although a monk, he didn't know how to say his prayers and because he had killed several people was not allowed to have a part in the chanting services. But he was considered a man of courage and audacity—greatly feared in the lamasery, a mighty friend and a terror to his enemies. When he walked along the narrow lamasery lanes all who met him gave him room to pass. And sometimes he took quite a lot of room. But the young son of the Samtsa chief was a rich monk, accustomed to respect, who never gave room to anyone when he walked the lanes. And he took a rather dim view of Stretch Ears' importance. They met one day where the path was narrow. Contemptuously, and with utter disregard for Stretch Ears' dangerous reputation, he pushed him aside.

"Ayah, but Stretch Ears hit him hard!" exclaimed old Duggur. "Blood came from the nose and our Samtsa priest, son of Mukring the chief, got the swollen face and fell down in the mud. He was only saved when Stretch Ears' friends held him back so he could hit no more. But one cannot afford to make a chief's son bleed at the nose and have a swollen face"—at this Dorlo winked at me with a slightly puffed eye—"without risking trouble. And now that I have at last met your friend Jamtzen, and see for myself that he is a good Tibetan—a Tibetan wild one—he is my friend too. I fear the trouble the Samtsa chief might make when Stretch Ears travels through Samtsa territory. In the chief's family, when the puppy can't bite the old dog growls for him."

A note of warning crept into his voice: "You tell Jamtzen to be careful—yes, to be very small-hearted when he travels through Samtsa country."

Ten days later Dorlo rode into our compound on a well-lathered horse. The news he brought matched his haste and excitement. The night before, the Samtsa chief had stopped Stretch Ears Jamtzen's caravan as it passed through Samtsa territory. No, Old Stretch Ears wasn't hurt, because he wisely surrendered when he saw that the odds were overwhelming. He didn't even fire a shot. He had only one companion and the two of them were completely surrounded so he had laid down his rifle and sat beside the fire, his bowl in his hand, while the chief's men took the caravan. He sat without saying a word until they took him off too. His companion,

being only a servant, had been later set free, but iron hobbles were locked on Stretch Ears and the Samtsa chief was at this moment holding the fifteen oxen, the loads, Stretch Ears' riding horse, pack mule, camp equipment, rifle and Stretch Ears himself in pound till the affair of his son's bloodied nose should be settled.

There was even talk that Stretch Ears was to be taken out and whipped as a preliminary to settlement. To Dorlo, the strangest thing of all was this: since he had laid his rifle down by the fire Stretch Ears Jamtzen had said no word, good or bad, to anyone. No, not even to Abba Duggur, who because of our mutual friendship, had joined with Stretch Ears' Samtsa friends and gone to intercede and try to mitigate the hardship of his lot.

"And Abba Duggur," finished Dorlo, "has much face with the Samtsa chief. But he told me to bring you word quickly, so you could join with Stretch Ears' friends at Taktsang Lhamo in getting him out of trouble, as friends must always do. He knows you, too, have much face with the Samtsa chief."

As I contemplated my responsibilities in the matter—and I knew enough of Tibetan custom to know they could not be lightly dismissed—I wished most heartily that Old Stretch Ears, as I disrespectfully dubbed him in my mind, had been a bit less handy with his fists and hadn't drawn blood from the nose of a chief's son. Why, of all people, should he pick on such an opponent?

But the occasion wasn't one for prolonged consideration.

Stretch Ears' friends in Lhamo were hastily gathering for action. They had already made a raid on the cloister quarters of the chief's son in an attempt to seize and hold him as a hostage. But through the workings of the almost telegraphic rumor communication of the Tibetans he had heard the news and left in a hurry. Knowing the speed and power of his big black horse, it was vain to think of trying to catch him. At any rate a large escort from Samtsa had no doubt started out to meet him and take him home for protection.

The growing crowd of Stretch Ears' partisan friends jammed my guest room, and finding Dorlo there, were half minded to seize him because of his membership in the Samtsa tribe and hold him as hostage. But the affair was one that cut across the lines of tribal loyalty, and when they learned that he too had been riding on Stretch Ears' behalf—the foam on his horse attested his zeal—they went into a huddle with him to discuss the chances of a rescue party breaking into the Samtsa chief's encampment. That, they decided, was out of the question. At best it would be but a hundred to one chance. The men of the encampment were on the alert and such a plan was most certainly doomed to failure. Again, the opportunity for reprisal was obvious and therefore dangerous to the prisoner.

We all wondered how Stretch Ears was getting on. In spite of Dorlo's assurances that the iron hobbles had been removed through the representations of his father, and the matter of the whipping postponed, most of the gathered friends knew from personal experience about the miseries of

life as a captive and were correspondingly doleful. In spite of this gloomy head shaking, the organization of those who by acquaintance, position or reputation had face with the Samtsa chief went forward. Not many hours of the day had passed before the cavalcade set out for Samtsa.

Elderly monks and ecclesiastics rode amid the whirl of prayer wheels and the mutter of prayers, lending quite a Buddhist odor of sanctity to the party. There were heavily armed men, grim of face and forthright in deed, who were bosom friends of Stretch Ears, come to add the silent protest of their presence at the audience with the chief. The talking was to be left to the glib exponents of Tibetan diplomacy—the official "talk" experts of the lamasery. And I too was there; neither a bad man of deeds nor a Tibetan orator but just another sort of friend of Stretch Ears Jamtzen, the man of many friends, and wishing most heartily all the while that he had not tapped the nose of the chief's son.

Our trip was a short one. As we rode up the valley, a rising cloud of dust that moved swiftly toward us dissolved into a jostling herd of yak, urged to a rapid shuffle by Stretch Ears himself. He whirled a long whip and rode on the flank, crying the shrill call of the yak drivers: "Dzo-eee, Dzo-ss!"

His welcome was hilarious and noisy. While friends took charge of the loaded oxen he and I turned up the shorter, narrow trail along the hillside. Stretch Ears rode nonchalantly, his bony, rather grim face, weather-beaten, hard-bitten and thickly coated with the dust of the winter's trail, and topped by a jaunty fox-fur hat, showed complete satisfaction. Buckled over his priestly robes a full cartridge belt

held a short sword. His rifle rested across the saddle front. The slanting afternoon sun outlined him against the background of bleak wintertime steppe. Far-off snow peaks broke the horizon and lent a mood of utter desolation and wildness to the scene. For all the monkly meditative garb that is a direct copy of the statuesque swaddlings of the Buddha philosopher of the Bho tree, Stretch Ears the horseman, with his rifle cocked across his saddle bow, was the true barbaric figure to ride across that background. As we lurched along at a smart trot, he shifted sideways in his saddle the better to talk.

"So," said he with a faint smile, "you have become a 'Tibetan wild one' have you? Come to the help of your friend like a Tibetan should? But it wasn't necessary. I am free because of two things: my silence and Abba Duggur's speech. From the time I laid my rifle down and took up my bowl of tea at the camp fire, until the chief said, 'Take all you have and go,' I would not speak a word. They bound me, they threatened to beat me, they threatened to kill me, and the chief's son, when he arrived, took a whip and said he would whip me, but I wouldn't open my mouth. And then Duggur, who understands silence, came and spoke for me because both he and I are your friends, having learned to know each other in your guest room. Ah, he is this kind of a Tibetan, and this kind of a man"—his two thumbs turned up and his tongue came out in the most complimentary gesture a Tibetan knows—"so when he finished speaking the affair was settled and I was free."

Our horses trotted on down the rough trail and took a bit

of ice in their stride with a wild scramble of hooves, but Stretch Ears never shifted in his saddle and continued to answer my questions.

"Yes, I have to pay a big atonement," he admitted ruefully, "but after all, one can't hit a chief's son without paying something. Think of striking a blow that costs two hundred or more ounces of silver! All my friends are good fellows. They will help me pay." His tawny eyes twinkled with amusement at this. Suddenly they flashed with a wilder gleam.

"But by the Twelve Sacred Books! By the Body of the Buddha! By the Towers of the Temple! By the Thunderbolts of Hell! Yes, by"—here his mind went back to pre-Lamaistic lore for oaths of real significance—"by the Sacred Magic, by the Blue Heaven itself, who is the one in the lamasery that sent word of my going to the Samtsa chief? And if that son of a chief"—here his voice was richly ironic—"crowds me again, I'll hit him again and hit him well! Maybe I'll mark his head with my sword."

A sudden thought struck him: "If I should cut up his head, you are not to sew it up so the wounds heal quickly and leave no scars. If I cut open his head I want it to hurt for months and leave places where the hair won't grow, so all may know that Jamtzen can strike hard. And when a Tibetan hits with his fist blood will flow from the nose and with his sword the wounds are long in healing. Yes, by the Twelve Sacred Books, it is so!"

We jolted on down the trail. I stole a look at Stretch Ears'

face. It seemed relentlessly grim but a certain gleam in his tawny eyes prompted my final remark. "Jamtzen," I said, "maybe you and I had better practice with the play-gloves before you hit any more noses."

He chuckled and presently we turned into the gateway leading to home and a bowl of tea besides the cheerful warmth of the guest room fire.

IX

The Shadow of the Robbers' God

Most of my men were out gathering fuel—the disks and lumps of *argols* (cow chips) that dotted the old campsite—when I rode into camp one mid-winter evening. But my companion, Stretch Ears Jamtzen, came back to work the bellows and get the tea boiling. As he skillfully manipulated the goatskin bag, forcing a draft through an iron tube into the center of the heaped chips, he tersely outlined the prospects of the trip.

"I'm glad you got here safely," he said warmly. "You should have kept the servants with you instead of sending them with me and the baggage animals. One should never ride alone in Tibetan country, especially in this region that lies in the shadow of the mountain called Amni Hwargan. While you were away we caught up to a larger caravan—they number twelve rifles—so now we need have no fear about tomorrow's road. Have you seen anyone all day, and did you travel above the valley floor as you came?"

I assured him that I had come with due observance of

all the customary precautions, for the shadow of Amni Hwargan is the shadow of the shrine of the robbers' mountain god, and his devotees haunt the region. I mixed my bowl of tsamba and buttery tea with keen relish, for I had been riding since dawn without a stop. There were freshly toasted sausages on one of the three rocks that upheld the kettle. The misshapen pile of argols gave out blue flame, much smoke and fierce flares of heat that drew both of us into a close huddle as I sampled the sausages. Smoke from a cow chip fire doesn't make one's eyes smart as smoke from a wood fire does, and eating was difficult unless one could warm one's fingers, chilled by a bitter January wind at over twelve thousand feet above sea level.

"I know the leader of this caravan," Stretch Ears talked as I ate, "so we have good companions and won't need to travel at night. Tonight we can get a good rest. He has twelve rifles. With our added four we could get through anywhere, and after tomorrow we will be in safe country."

The members of the other "kettle"—each party having a separate camp fire is called a "kettle," and the phrase always made me think of the Janizaries marshaled for battle according to their kettle standards—came staggering up with their lapfuls of fuel and dumped them near the fires. My two servants, one a Chinese and one a Tibetan, had made additional provision by filling two large sacks. So, with plenty of fuel, we set ourselves to enjoy a pleasant evening.

Numbers did away with the necessity of keeping the fires down and we piled on the chips, boiling meat, cracking

marrow bones, and feasting far into the night.

The horses, thoroughly disgusted with such grazing as they had found, crowded close in a circle around the fire, waiting for the tiny allotment of grain that went into each bag. We all put off turning in; it was sure to be cold no matter how we slept. The wind had ceased and the sky was cloudless: a combination that always means the lowest temperatures. Finally, turning in could be delayed no longer, and we each chose a place among the hummocks of the frozen bog. With saddle as pillow and saddle blanket as rug, we bedded down.

All day my long Tibetan sheepskin coat, that would have dragged on the ground had it not been bloused at the hips with girdle and cartridge belt, had seemed every ounce of its fifty pounds, and its six-inch-long fleece somewhat overbulky. Now it became suddenly a flimsy, lightweight thing that let in far too much of the frost. Yet I wasn't too cold to sleep. The last bit of conversation died away.

Suddenly I was wide awake, knowing that everyone else was awake, too. Then came the sound that had awakened me: the quick thud of hooves on the frozen ground together with the one clear sound that can't be muffled—the rattle of a bit as a horse tosses his head. The hair rose on my head and chilly fingers tickled my backbone as a yell—an eerie yelp like a hound giving tongue followed by a minor wail like the howl of a wolf—rang in the dark and rose to a torrent of sound as the camp took it up in chorus.

"We sound like a hundred men," I thought as I added my

startled: "Come on, come on—" to the challenges flung into the night. Then all was quiet except for the snick of rifle bolts.

I was listening for the first shot when a hoarse, faintly amused voice spoke out of the darkness. "That's all right, Jamtzen, we're coming but don't shoot. We're friends."

"What friends?" cracked the answer, and for a few seconds the night was filled with a noisy cross-examination until Stretch Ears was satisfied. I saw him rise to welcome the newcomers as they rode into camp.

Someone threw fresh fuel on the fire. The blaze leapt in rhythmic flashes to the slap of the bellows. But I was shivering—with cold, I argued to myself—and burrowed deeper into my sheepskin. I could hear scraps of conversation from the circle around the campfire.

"Yes, two hundred . . . mounted and left yesterday . . . going to camp along the road . . . rob everyone that comes along . . . to hell with those Drangwa (a tribe of Tebus famed as robbers) . . . no, not just a rumor . . . we bought this information from a reliable source and, being your friends, came to tell you."

Then came Stretch Ears' guttural snarl. "Eight rifles, and we are sixteen. With twenty-four good fellows and twenty-four rifles we can have a fine time. We'll get through and give those Drangwa fellows a good scare while we do it. I'm glad you came to help."

The silence that followed was heavy with embarrassment. The leader of the other kettle mentioned something about

his yak caravan not being able to travel at a fighting pace. A bedlam of argument broke out around the fire.

In a few minutes Stretch Ears walked over to me, vocal with disgust: "They are turning back and say we must turn back too. They won't go with us and ride through. Now what are we to do?"

It was no use to start out and try to get through in the dark. In two hours the moon would be up and everything would be as bright as day. I had urgent business down at the Chinese frontier, and so had Stretch Ears, but there seemed nothing we could do. And I was no longer shivery with cold. My sheepskin had begun to show signs of growing too small for both my rifle and myself. But, by making sundry adjustments, I found a relative degree of comfort. Sure now that no one could attack us with impunity I relaxed and went to sleep. Even the rising of the moon didn't wake me.

The brightly burning fires of the night before had used up all but a handful of fuel and there was barely enough left to boil a kettle of tea, so breakfast was a dismal affair. It was bitterly cold; pulling the girth buckles and roping the loads was merciless to the fingers. Turning back in the cold light of day seemed more distasteful than ever. Our friends came over to help lash the last pack but Stretch Ears groused by the fire and even my Tibetan servant was a bit sullen. Suddenly the boy tugged at my sleeve.

"Let those folks go back. We can get through," he muttered.

I too had been thinking hard. Away from the long valley

of the main road there was a detour. I mentioned it to Stretch Ears.

"Yes," he agreed doubtfully, "we can try it, but it's a bad trail in winter. Have you ever traveled it in winter? Ay-yah!! Still, we could try it. It leads into the main valley quite far down but not below where those dog-headed Drangwa may be camped." His eyes watched my face and then his own face brightened.

"We'll try it!" he whispered. "And tell these folks we are riding straight on down the main valley with only four rifles. That ought to make their faces burn."

Three hours later at the fork of the road we left the well-trampled main trail and turned off, climbing into country seldom if ever traveled in wintertime. We crossed a pass where the horses struggled belly-deep in drifted snow while Stretch Ears and I climbed on foot close under the shadow of the Laptsi (shrine) of Amni Hwargan, whose shadow rests with ominous significance over all this range of no man's land.

There, close to the sheaf of giant arrows that marks the peak, and is the quiver of the god of thieves, I focused my binoculars with numbed fingers while Jamtzen urged: "Look carefully and see if you find any sign of riders, smoke or any movement. Look again for anyone who is riding under the shadow of Amni Hwargan. Here—I wish you would make an offering to him."

But I could see nothing, nor had I any offering to make that would replenish the fantastic ammunition of the raid-

ers' god. I thought he had quite enough. Without further delay we scrambled down into the valley, following it until it narrowed into a canyon with steep, brush-covered walls. Here a long slope of glare ice filled the valley bottom for two hundred yards and stopped all progress. Stretch Ears ranged back and forth like a hound at fault and then looked at the cold ghost of the sun in the pale winter sky. We had dismounted instinctively, and now he started to lead his horse onto the ice. The horse snorted and balked and the jerk threw Stretch Ears sprawling onto the ice. Remaining in a sitting position, he slowly pulled himself back to land. In the process an idea came to him.

"Push this horse out onto the ice," he said, "push him and then follow, doing as I do."

His big gray was dragged and pushed onto the ice. Instantly the horse lost his footing and went down. Stretch Ears threw himself on the horse's neck to hold him down, and the floundering, struggling pair, gathering momentum, swiftly coasted over two hundred yards of ice and came to their feet with a scramble and a flourish at the end.

"It's all right, come on!" he shouted. "Just so the horses don't break their legs when they fall."

The two mules, seeing the lead horse two hundred yards down the valley, ranged back and forth restlessly and then broke for the boulder-studded bush-grown walls of the canyon. They somehow got through but the horses were driven onto the ice and in a sprawling kicking tangle we all reached honest dirt and gravel at the lower end of the slide.

"Now we can't go back," remarked Stretch Ears rather grimly, "and if there are robbers at the lower end of the valley we are caught."

We rode all day along icy winter trails and just after dusk, with appropriate precautions, we turned into the main valley. It was quite well wooded; the dark spruces gave an illusion of shelter and warmth that suggested camp and rest. But Stretch Ears kept doggedly on. The trail was wide and well marked and we bunched more closely than we had all day. My horse ranged alongside Stretch Ears' gray and I asked him where we would stop.

"About three rifle shots from here is the last place where the robbers would dare stop for camp or ambush," he answered. "After we pass that spot we can camp wherever there is broken brushwood for fuel."

I couldn't quite make out all the words of his reply and tilted my fox fur from off my ear. At that instant a faint shout come from down stream.

"Someone ahead," I warned, and we came to a sudden halt. Stretch Ears sniffed the air as if it could tell him something. It did.

"Yes, there is smoke in the air," he grumbled. "Catch the mules and let us rerope the loads right here. If a load got loose or turned while we were riding fast we would have to leave it and lose it."

The boys led the mules to keep them from running up in their friendly fashion to the first camp fire they saw and we went cautiously on.

About half a mile further on Stretch Ears dismounted. He whispered: "Here, hold our horses and keep your hands on their muzzles. If they start to nicker, squeeze them."

The boys waited, holding the animals while we crawled to the shoulder of the turn and looked down the trail to where we could see four camp fires burning brightly a short distance from the path.

"They expect no one at night and are resting," mused Stretch Ears. "We can get past if we ride fast, and one hundred paces beyond is the water and ice of the ford. If we get past that safely we'll be all right. I wonder if their horses are saddled?"

But it was far too dark to make that out, so we crept back to our own mounts. Presently, with rifles slanted across our chests at the ready, we rode around the bend of the road. For a hundred yards no one saw or heard us and then someone shouted. Stretch Ears' yell, as we loosened our reins and lashed our horses, still rings through the years for me. I remember figures of men running in the firelight. I remember Stretch Ears' rifle brandished in a gesture of warning and defiance. A rifle cracked, another, and then our horses crashed into ice and water at the ford. We were past. We hurdled ledges to gain the opposite bank and rode frantically around the next bend in the valley.

Here Stretch Ears pulled up and dismounted. "Come on, Sherab, let's see," he urged, and we both climbed the shoulder to look back on the trail. Four hundred yards up the valley four fires burned brightly and we could hear the ex-

cited hum of many voices. But no one was following. Jamtzen crept close to me. "Your rifle will carry that far, I know it will," ne said. "See if you can't hit one of the fires, just to scare them," he begged.

But I was already turning back to the horses. Somewhere down the valley, after a few hours more of riding, would be a camp, food and rest. After a ride from dawn till midnight, under the shadow of Amni Hwargan, I needed them. I was in a hurry to make that camp and call it a day. Stretch Ears had to be disappointed.

X

Shoes of Silver for Information

Several weeks later Jamtzen and I rode a different trail. The starless Tibetan night brought the horizon to my very eyelids. It was so dark that at intervals I stretched my whip-hand at arm's length, moving it back and forth to press back the blackness and, if the motion made a deeper blur, thus win an arm's length field of vision. The horse under me twisted slightly in his steady gait as he followed some sort of a trail, lost to my eyes since darkness had overtaken us. We had come out of the mountains and down onto the great plain, and had been traveling across it blindly, it seemed to me, for at least two hours.

My horse stopped and I could feel him rub his nose against the horse ahead of him. Stretch Ears had pulled up short and said in a deep guttural whisper, "Blackness of the blackness everywhere—too dark for shooting. But you say that you shoot flying birds by pointing without aiming. Could you do that now with your rifle?"

I had been thinking of the cozy warmth, the brightness,

the cheer and the enveloping sense of security that is painted by firelight flickering on the walls of a black yak-hair tent. But I was jolted back to reality. The night reached with ghostly fingers for the back of my neck and my scalp tingled. Then we were challenged with startling suddenness.

"Arrol Who are you?" At the same time I heard the indistinct "whet" of quickly drawn swords.

Stretch Ears' voice echoed faintly a yard away: "Answer, Sherab, these may be Samtsa raiders and they may know me."

I spoke up with forced assurance. "Sherab Dzondri. The outlander from Lhamo." Finding my voice gained strength with use, I cleared it and added, "Don't come near. We have rifles."

The voice replied out of the darkness: "What are you doing so near the Bu tents at night, a night that is blackness of blackness? Whose tent do you visit? Whom do you know?"

I was spared making an answer, for Stretch Ears recognized, if not the individual voice, at least the inflection of the Buwa tribe. In response to the twitch of his bridle hand his horse moved off as he answered with assurance: "And I am Akku Jamtzen. We are coming to visit Rinchen. Can you show us the way? I was afraid we were getting too near the swamp or the river."

"We know where the road is. Never fear about the swamp or the river," voices answered and the darkness deepened

with a sudden blur as riders—we finally made out two—jostled us on the trail. "We too are going to Rinchen's and will take you there."

One rider pressed his horse close to mine and a hand fumbled at my saddle. Then he spoke: "It's the outlander all right. The saddle isn't Tibetan although his clothes are. Look, there is the Garma encampment and Rinchen's tent is on the far side."

We had evidently come to the crest of a rise, for flashes of light gleamed in an irregular oval before us. Through the night we could hear the baying of the camp mastiffs: a menacing roar that grew steadily in intensity as we rode forward. Flares of light stabbed the gloom with vivid wounds as tent flaps swung open and flames leaped to the breath of the bellows. Suddenly, like a shrill, irregular, minor fugue, eerie yells ringed the encampment with sound. Our companions took up the refrain, and voices near and far began to shout: "Come on, come on! Rinchen's tent. Rinchen, O Rinchen, you have guests." Then the hoarse barking of the big black dogs was all around us.

Against the sudden flare of tent fires I could dimly make out that the three ahead of me were beginning to swing their long tether ropes, weighted at the ends with heavy whiphandles. Remembering that the post of danger is always in the rear, I hurried into line, knotting the lash of my antelope-horn whiphandle to the tie rope as I rode. The way to keep the dogs at bay is to ride two by two at not too fast a pace, in a half-circle, swinging the weighted

tether ropes in a wide circle, one on each side. The riders themselves must keep carefully within the safe area made by the wnistling ropes.

I had often watched Tibetan riders go through an encampment, keeping perfect rhythm in their swing, while a score or more of dogs yelped bitterly and waited for the one mishap that would place the riders at their mercy. I had even ridden in with Tibetan companions, swinging my rope with the rest, and only hoping that it would not get tangled under my horse's tail, or over the rifle on my back. But I had never entered an encampment at night.

It was now a wild obstacle race among hobbled horses and bedded cattle. The dogs darted like hungry shadows where the tent ropes offered hidden snares to catch our swinging ropes and caused the whiphandles to bounce off bewildered sheep and wild-eyed cattle. Suddenly my rope came back the wrong way, in a tangle around my horse's neck, and for a minute I thought the big brutes would be up on the horse behind me. But the added confusion of darkness seemed to have bewildered even the dogs. One must have nipped my mount but just as he leaped I got the rope to swinging again and a few moments later we all rolled off into the waiting arms of Slab Face Rinchen and his family.

Our horses tethered, we entered the world of light and cheer where the hearth fire flamed within the tent. As the flap dropped behind us the yells and confusion outside slowly died away. The dogs, however, continued to bicker fitfully among themselves for long moments. We relaxed,

and while we waited for a big haunch of mutton to cook, drank buttery tea and laid a foundation of tsamba.

Stretch Ears began oratorically to tell Slab Face Rinchen how two horses had been stolen from me and that we were on the trail of a vague rumor that someone in Bu had information for sale. As he spoke, I watched the two men who had joined us on the trail and had come with us to Slab Face's tent. In contrast to our deliberation as we waited for the meat to cook, they ate rapidly, mouthing their finger tips hungrily as they mixed the tsamba. Both were travel-stained and worn and both were poorly clad. Their sheepskin cloaks were frayed and ragged, their boots marvels of patchwork, and the long, straight swords in their belts were heavy, utilitarian and devoid of any ornamentation.

In accordance with the Tibetan ideal of taking prompt action when mishap occurs, I had followed Stretch Ears when my horses were stolen on what I was sure was a wild goose chase. He had insisted that we must seek information and so I had ridden with him to Bu. As we sat around the fire the burden of his speech sounded most fantastic. But as I watched the faces' touched by firelight within Rinchen's tent, I saw that they were all in entire agreement with him. And especially so in the matter of the importance of *buying* information. That was evidently the crux of the matter. No testimony or witness was worth acting on or would stand the grueling tests of Tibetan justice or retribution unless it had been duly paid for. And although Stretch Ears had

heard rumors, he had found no one who would accept payment for his whispered tale, thereby changing it from rumor to truth. All nodded agreement that *gtams-dzan* (report-payment) must be given before any report could be accepted as worth acting upon. The two ragged guests for all their hurry to eat seemed to give peculiar heed to the argument.

Before the meat was ready they had finished their tsamba and were preparing to go. But one lingered long enough to ask me if I knew how much a *tamtra* (single-shot 1872 Russian rifle) would cost in Lhamo. I said that I knew of two for sale at the cost of fifty ounces of silver apiece, and their eyes gleamed with sudden interest. Slab Face at first urged them to stay for the meat, but after a whispered discussion followed them out of the tent. I thought I saw him take down a gun and give it to them as they went.

While I sleepily made up a bed consisting of my saddle, a saddle blanket and my Tibetan boots, and was about to roll up in my big cloak, the night outside was filled with a rising crescendo of sound. The fitful bickering of the dogs went on and on. I wondered sleepily why men who were so obviously weary were riding into the night when the swamp and the river were dangerously near.

Days passed uneventfully while we visited pleasantly in Slab Face's encampment. Stretch Ears angled deviously for the information he sought in regard to my horses and held numerous private interviews and conferences. But the disgust on his face deepened as the days went by and he

could find no tale for which payment could be made in good hard silver. The community intelligence service that made this land of raids and ambushments a great whispering gallery of rumor brought word, however, that the morning after our arrival a party of Samtsa raiders had crossed the ford of the river and had ridden southward. The report specified that it was a large party of at least one hundred and fifty rifles and that every rider led a spare mount. It could only mean that the raid was against the Chakgama, the lifelong enemies of the Samtsa.

The encampment buzzed with interest. On the whole it was an oddly impartial interest. But some, like Stretch Ears Jamtzen, bore the Samtsa no good will and others had their own scores against the famed robber tribe of Chakgama. On the fourth day word came that for no known reason the raiders had turned back. There had been no fight. The forces of the two tribes hadn't even met, yet the Samtsa were riding swiftly homeward. All the encampment wondered why, although Stretch Ears snorted his contempt and cracked sly jokes at the Samtsa's expense, for the affair of his pugilism with the chief's son still rankled him.

Late that afternoon two riders broke through the ring of the encampment and, swinging their tie ropes with practiced ease to keep off the dogs, even essayed a certain jauntiness that ill matched their own travel-worn appearance. Their jaded horses fairly staggered as they approached Slab Face's tent. Our sudden acquaintances of that first night had come back and again we sat around the fire drink-

ing our tea and waiting for the meat to cook. This time they were as unhurried as we, sampling the flavor of every mouthful with deep satisfaction. The tense strain of days of uncertainty seemed to slip from them and they grew expansive and garrulous with good feeding.

"By the Honorable Corpse of the Buddha, yes, by the Presence, where do you think we have been, Sherab, and what do you think we had when we found you in the dark?" questioned the younger, as he greased his face and smoothed his tangled hair. When I shook my head, not wishing to interrupt the story that seemed to clothe him with bravado, he went on to tell the rest.

"We heard that day in Lhamo," he said, "that someone knew the best horses of the Samtsa tribe were being emptied for fast riding; they were being kept tied up all day instead of being let out to graze. So we rode for Samtsa and watched the riders gather. Just as darkness came, Hwarlo here, leading my horse so he would be like them—for every rider led an extra mount—joined them and rode with them until he heard the word 'Chakgama.' Then he came back to me and we rode for Bu, finding you in the dark, for Rinchen's encampment is on the way to Chakgama. We had information to sell, but the ones who would give gtam-dzan were in Chakgama beyond the bend of the Yellow River.

"After we left here with some food and a borrowed gun, for we are poor and do not own rifles, we rode through the blackness of blackness. We know where the river and swamp are and could ride fast where others must go slowly

in the dark. We swam the river when the Samtsa raiders were but halfway there. In Chakgama, how much, foreigner, do you think the gtam-dzan was for the information we brought? The Chakgama knew nothing and feared nothing. But for the news that sent scouts out to watch the fords, and for the news that gathered the tribal troops, the Chakgama, when they knew that they could ambush the Samtsa at that difficult ford of the White River, paid well! Yes, by the Body, by the mummy of the Buddha, in white silver, a shoe of fifty ounces."

The speaker drew an eared oval of silver, known as a fifty tael shoe, from the knotted twists of his girdle and handled it lovingly in the firelight. A murmur of approbation broke the silence and the shoe was passed from hand to hand for closer inspection.

Stretch Ears swore softly and approvingly as he muttered: "Good information for which one might well pay good silver. By the Sacred Book, yes!"

"Now, Sherab," went on the hero of the moment, savoring to the full the triumph that was his, "we can buy a tam-tra, and carrying a gun we need no longer be afraid—we, the poor ones, who had nothing, not even a new girdle to enhance our appearance." He greased his face once more and grinned at Slab Face's daughter. Like the rest, she flashed approving and admiring glances his way.

The meat was done and brought on, blood, grease and juices running down the sides of the trencher. Just as we drew our knives Hwarlo, the silent one, spoke for the first

time. "Yes," he agreed contentedly, "a shoe of white silver is good, yet it will buy only one rifle, and we are two. But when we left Chakgama there was still time, for the Samtsa traveled slowly. They are not good raiders but they have good horses." (Here Stretch Ears grunted agreement.) "So we met them before they reached the ford of the White River. Do you know that ford, Sherab, where the banks are so high and the water is so broad and deep? What do you think the Samtsa paid in gtam-dzan for the news that their raid was known and an ambush was laid against them at the ford of the White River?" In his bleak scarred face his eyes glittered with triumph, amusement and utter recklessness as he asked the question.

"I know what you are thinking," he answered himself, before I could open my mouth. "One can always lie. But the news we sold them was true and because it was true we received a good shoe of white silver as gtam-dzan."

With those words and a full sense of the drama of the action, he brought from among the knotted twists of his girdle a second oval of silver to be examined and admired in the flickering light of the fire. "Now we will each carry a rifle and even if they are only tam-tras, with a rifle on one's back it is easy to come by wealth.

"By the Sacred Books!" he exclaimed as a sudden afterthought. "Because the Chakgama learned of a raid they laid an ambush; because the Samtsa learned of the ambush they turned back; and because they turned back there was no fighting and no one was killed. So we, by the very Towers of

Religion, have heaped merit for ourselves and are the preservers of life!" With an odd, half-humorous gesture he reached for Slab Face's rosary and counted off a prayer or two. His voice reflected a profound amazement that wealth and merit had come together from a single action.

Stretch Ears rose impressively to his full height, fixed the two with an enigmatic stare and spoke weightily. "You are the ones I am looking for. Will you now ride for me for a few days seeking information about Sherab Dzondri's stolen horses? His gtam-dzan will buy shells for your new rifles."

The eyes of the younger brave gleamed with answering interest and he half nodded but the other one spoke gravely. "Samtsa is north and Chakgama is south," he said, "so now for many moons we must ride with a small heart, thinking always of the north and south. By now they both know and we can't meet any of either tribe without trouble. For a time we will stay at home or ride only in the blackness of blackness."

I remembered the sudden chill and tingling of my scalp when the sense of unknown riders somewhere in the darkness had overtaken me on the plain. Now the two would have rifles, and looking at their reckless faces I silently hoped we would never meet in the blackness of blackness when raiders ride and information is gathered at a shoe of silver for the telling.

But I was sorry not to have their help in recovering my stolen horses.

XI

Payment for Jigmet's Tale

As he sat one day in the guest room of the mission compound drinking tea and eating hot boiled mutton, Jigmet seemed swollen with importance, bursting with a secret all his own. We sat across from each other with the great bronze guest room teapot between us and at intervals Jigmet's crafty eyes, set in a peculiarly stolid face, would watch me curiously. Half a dozen times it seemed as if he were about to say something but instead he remarked how tasty the meat was. It was indeed tasty. I was using my knife almost as industriously as he.

We were in no sense strangers. In fact, he was one of my earliest friends in the turbulent tribe of Rzakdumba. He called himself my first friend but there were others whom I had known as long and trusted far more fully than Jigmet. Yet he had always been more than careful in extending us the rites of hospitality and we had camped at his tent door when we visited the tribe. Often before his eyes had rested curiously on me but never more obviously or at such length.

Questions revolved in the back of my own mind. Even as I pushed the trencher of meat closer to Jigmet, I remembered the illusive rumors that had whispered his name when my horses were stolen. But there had been nothing definite that one could buy and use as testimony. My horses, at any rate, were still missing. Perhaps those who started the whisperings had been afraid, for Jigmet had had a turbulent and eventful past and was still hale and hearty though less inclined to all-night riding than formerly.

He finally pushed back the platter of meat, wiped his hands on the leather of his sheepskin cloak and cleared his throat. "I have something to tell you," he whispered, "but not in the house." His brief gesture supplied each knothole in the paneled wall with a listening ear and we moved outside. But the courtyard wasn't empty so we climbed to a lonely spot on the hillside near by.

"You like your new place away from the trading-post village?" he quizzed, pointing to where the twelve-foot walls of the compound rose on the point that overlooked the stream. "You like to be alone?"

I thought to myself that I did. Indeed, after we had finally settled on the point, our nights had been quieter than when we lived in the noise and fierce alarms of the trading post. And whenever the barking of dogs and sound of shooting came to us, I savored the thought of the high walls of the compound, remembering that they were made of pounded earth and ribbed with hidden timbers strong enough to frustrate anyone who might try to dig through.

Living at Taktsang Lhamo, center of the worst robber region of northeast Tibet, forced one to think of things like that. So now I surveyed the solid walls with satisfaction. I suddenly realized that Jigmet had not expected a reply and was veering to another tack.

"Things have changed in the Lhamo district since the time you came more than three years ago," he was saying, and I caught another crafty glance. "Some lamas have read curses and tell the people to drive you out because of the new religion you bring. Of course you have made friends—good ones like me—but one must always act with a small heart. Your house is all by itself, far away from neighbors."

Jigmet was right, I reflected. Conditions were different from the time when we had come to Lhamo. I had made a host of friends in the district on whom I could depend and had gradually won a reputation that gave me some assurance as far as danger from robbery and violence on the trail was concerned. In the natural course of events we should have been much safer than three years before. But other factors had entered in. In our work, the first triumphs of the faith we preached had aroused a fierce hostility in quarters where before there had only been careless indifference and a certain contemptuous tolerance. Both friendliness and hatred were keener. I merely nodded at this veiled warning, wondering what was to come next.

Jigmet quickly broke the rest of his news. Rumors had come to him of a robber clan within his own tribe that was banding together to raid and wipe us out. He didn't know

just how true it was but his source of information was trustworthy and he would find out further details. In the meantime, he urged, be careful and trust to my friends—those who had my interest at heart, like himself. The seed sown, Jigmet gathered his cloak about him and we walked back to the compound, where he mounted his horse. I watched him ride away; the trite phrase, "act with a small heart," now pregnant with new meaning, rang in my ears.

It was still early in the afternoon, so I strolled up to the lamasery to see Jamtzen, my mentor-in-chief. He too was sampling freshly cooked mutton and to be polite I was forced to join him. Even when eating there was a certain grim intentness about his expression. On each side of his freshly shaved head his ears reached outward from the strongly molded but none too handsome face. As we looked through the latticed window we could see my place barely two hundred yards away.

"Jamtzen," I said, "is my place so far away from neighbors that I should fear attack?"

He did not answer the question. Instead, he asked me what was up and I told him all that Jigmet had said. As I talked, his eyes, shadowed by a half-scowl, never left my face. A score of times—on the trail and during episode after episode of our eventful association—I had seen the same expression on his face. Would he never get over looking faintly curious? I thought. But, partly in answer to the question in his eyes, I went on to tell him of my own deep suspicions of Jigmet. His head nodded in agreement, still he

cautioned me. "It may be true," he said, "all true. What would you do if it were true? Would you stay or would you take Dorje Mtso and Da-whay down to Chinese country for a while?" His eyes bored into mine with fierce intentness and I sensed that the test of travel and residence in northeast Tibet might well be in that moment.

"Even if it is true, I stay," I announced firmly, or at least I hoped it was firmly. "The walls are the height of a horseman's spear, my servants are brave and I have seven rifles. You know even Dorje Mtso, and Da-whay too, though he is but a child, can shoot."

His face cleared with startling suddenness; he looked almost gay and astonishingly friendly. "Ah wild one of a true Tibetan, foreigner though you are! Nothing can happen until Jigmet comes again. When he does come, and he will come to get payment for information, send for me and I will talk Tibetan logic for you. Tell him I am your spokesman."

Thus it happened that the next time Jigmet rode in with a face full of portent and secrecy, I held up his story until Stretch Ears could join us in our secret conclave. If Jigmet was disconcerted at the monk's presence, he didn't show it; he seemed to take it as a matter of course that my friends would give their counsel and advice. The tale he brought was complete in every detail.

Thirty men, said Jigmet, had taken an oath to have a part in the raid, for wasn't there much loot to be had from my place? All was arranged except fixing the time and that

would only be decided after the sorcerers had found a lucky date. But we could buy definite notice even of that date by giving good gtam-dzan in time to get the warning. Then, if need be, Jigmet himself would come up and help us. As he talked about gtam-dzan, Stretch Ears' eyes caught mine in a stare of such utter blankness that I remembered that he had foretold the seeking of gtam-dzan. Jigmet hastened to add that the information as to time could very easily be checked by the occurrence itself; if the attack took place on the stated night would it not be proof of the warning's worth? And we could then pay the informant through him.

There was no opportunity to speak to Stretch Ears privately. I had introduced him as my spokesman and would have to let the affair progress on that basis. But I badly wanted to tell him about the picture that had risen in my mind as Jigmet talked: Maybe it was all a fake; the raid, the thirty men and the special informant. Jigmet would come with information that the raid was to take place on a special night and then, in the darkness, he and a few cronies could circle the compound once or twice, yelling and shooting. Next morning Jigmet would collect gtam-dzan for a true report. All this could very well be. But Stretch Ears was already speaking, and what would be must be.

"Gtam-dzan," said Stretch Ears firmly, "is a good Tibetan custom of which Sherab Dzondri may not know; yet he has told me all his mind and I will speak for him even to the fixing of the amount."

Jigmet's usually stolid face seemed a trifle less impassive as he listened and his eyes shifted toward me for the briefest moment before turning back to watch Stretch Ears intently.

"In an affair of such magnitude," Stretch Ears continued, "it is futile to talk of merely a few ounces of silver, or even a shoe of fifty taels. This is a matter involving thousands of taels. So we will pay accordingly."

I could hardly believe my ears. What was he letting me in for in the matter of cash payments? Yet now was not a time to stop the rolling periods of his oratory.

"Bring us the names and the number of the raiding party," ordered Stretch Ears, "let us know the night the attack is to take place, and we will pay according to the great custom. Gtam-dzan will be half the value of everything involved. If the house is burned we will pay half the value of the house. If Sherab loses everything he possesses we will give half the value of all lost. And if he and his family are killed I still remain to pay half—half the value of his house, half the value of his things and half the value of his life money—all in gtam-dzan for true information of a real result-producing raid. You know here in Lhamo there is shooting almost every night and thieves are around almost anytime. Anything could be called a raid. But a real raid that produced results would have to be something, for Sherab Dzondri's walls are high and he is well armed, as you know. You tell us about the thirty horsemen: I think he would hardly consider thirty horsemen worth shooting at."

If ever there was a poker face Jigmet had it. He gravely pondered the proposition. Finally he nodded and acceded:

"It is a good offer but such information is hard to get. However I will do my best. Act with a small heart always, Sherab, and your friends, Akku Jamtzen and I, will do the very best for you." With that he was gone.

Stretch Ears snorted rather enigmatically after he had left. "Sherab, your foreign thought and my Tibetan thought were alike. But just the same it may be all true. Always act with a small heart and be prepared."

After that we placed a watch each night and slept with firearms within reach. Stations along the walls were assigned to each of us in case of attack and our nights were a bit more wakeful in uneasy suspense. Da-whay, child that he was, stood a tiny 22 rifle at his bedside each night and worried for fear he would sleep through the excitement.

As the days passed I became increasingly conscious that, in the many casual contacts of daily life, all with whom I had to do seemed to regard me with a curious intentness. My friends were especially friendly, assuring me of their interest, although no one ever mentioned the matter that was changing the compound into a sort of fort with strengthened gates and fire steps arranged conveniently at the corners of the wall.

Again Jigmet came to see me and this time he asked that Stretch Ears join us.

"I have," Jigmet informed me, "further word about the raid. Over eighty men are now involved and they wait only for a lucky date to be in the dark of the moon. But the matter of getting correct information on the basis of the

gtam-dzan you offer is most difficult. However," his eyes swung to Stretch Ears, "I have a special message from one of your Rzakdumba friends, Jamtzen. He says, why should Jamtzen risk his life for the foreigner? Be his friend and all that, but there is no cause for him to take his rifle and go down to sleep in the foreigner's place every night. There is no need that he be killed, for all will surely be killed in an attack by so large a force. And, Jamtzen, there is a rumor that someone in the compound has been bribed to open the gates. Even I, who have been in many fights, am afraid to stay here overnight lest that be the night of the raid. But I hope," said Jigmet magnanimously, "that I can get the information as to the exact night, for then Sherab can at least be ready."

Stretch Ears, who had been listening impassively to all this, spoke shortly, even a bit derisively, I thought. "I wouldn't come down here if Sherab asked me to, but he hasn't asked," he began. "He isn't afraid. He has plenty of men and weapons. Even his wife and child can shoot. A hundred men couldn't climb over his wall. Why should I sleep in his place to protect him? But of course, if in the night shooting sounded here I would come down with my rifle just as all his other friends in Lhamo—and he has many —would come to help him. It would take an army to attack him when he is so near the lamasery, for the lama would be involved."

It seemed to me that Stretch Ears and Jigmet were having a duel within the four walls of the guest room. Since the

matter was no longer a secret we stayed there and ate boiled mutton while we talked. But Jigmet seemed to have grown a bit weary.

"Well, I must go, Sherab," he sighed. "I will do the best I can in the matter of the information. And now, have you any dried onions left from the load you brought back from Chinese country? I liked the taste of them."

Jigmet had indeed made large inroads into my supply during his last visit but what mattered a few onions between friends? I filled his hands and went back into the guest room to hear Stretch Ears muttering: "Yes, they do taste good. I think I need a few too." So I filled his hands as well, till he could carry no more.

Although Stretch Ears still advised caution I set the watch for the night with a heart lighter than it had been for some time. Even the events of the next few days seemed somewhat of an anti-climax for I was almost sure that the affair had been settled that day in my guest room when Jigmet, Stretch Ears and I ate boiled mutton and drank innumerable bowls of tea.

First, the authorities of the Sechu lamasery took real cognizance of what they had known was going on since the beginning of the difficulty, and officially announced that there had been too much wild talk against the foreigner. If anything should happen to him, they stated, the lamasery would smart in the face for eighteen generations. At the first sound of trouble on any night, said the authorities, all were to rally to his place, without even bothering to pull their

boots on, and kill without mercy all those who made trouble.

Next the Rzakdumba chief came to see me. He was riding a big gray horse: a new purchase of which he seemed extremely fond. As a polite acknowledgment of this acquisition I tied a congratulatory scarf in the animal's mane, saying all the appropriate words for such an occasion. Stretch Ears, who had come with him, grinned impishly while this was going on. His lips still twitched when we adjourned to the guest room for tea and a big meal. But nothing was said of the matter of rumors. After the chief had ridden away Stretch Ears advised me to discontinue the watch at night. There would, he said, be no attack.

"Would there ever have been one?" I queried skeptically. "Wasn't it all a case of Jigmet's desire for gtam-dzan?"

"No one knows but Jigmet," he answered, "and he is your friend. You can never know for sure in Tibetan country, because anything can happen. I didn't know. No one knew. Now we think we know, but it may have been all true. Yet even eighty men attack a walled home only when the owner is scared. Were you scared, Sherab Dzondri, speaker of religion?"

I did not give an answer. But Stretch Ears furnished me with one. "If you were," he smiled, "Jigmet, at least, does not know it. Yes, you are getting to be a good Tibetan—a Tibetan wild one. By the Sacred Books, you are! And those who have believed your religion are safer, too, because Jigmet did not scare you away or collect gtam-dzan. The

lama's curses have not worked as yet, and you still live in Taktsang Lhamo in a house that has no neighbors—a house that is set up on a hill."

The last phrase sounded vaguely familiar. I wondered whether Stretch Ears had been reading the Gospel, translated into Tibetan, which I had once given him, but forbore to question further.

XII

Peace Negotiations

Another night had passed and our house had not been stoned. Unquestionably, I mused, the more fanatic element in the lamasery had been incensed when Ata, one of their number, had made confession of faith in the new religion I brought to Taktsang Lhamo. Many of our friends had, with great good will, become quite belligerent on our behalf, and Jigmet's attempt to capitalize on the situation had resulted in a reaffirmation by the lamasery authorities of their intention to give us protection. But in spite of the official pronouncement there was still a strong undercurrent of hostility in the attitude of a certain faction in the lamasery. And the big stones from Tibetan slings hummed night after night into the compound like giant buzzing bees. It was almost like war.

Maybe, I thought, it *was* war which had stopped them, now that there had been no stones for two nights. At any rate there was a war on, and most Tibetans were too busy wondering and fearing what would happen to their own

lives to have time to sling stones into the foreigner's place. The war had started over some trifling disagreement between the Shetsang chief and the Samtsa chief about the management of a dispute in the Shetsang lamasery. Driven to desperation by the threatening attitude of the Shetsang chief who commanded a larger number of rifles, the Samtsa chief had appealed to a Chinese general beyond the Chinese border. Now, for the first time in the memory of the people of the border, a Chinese army had clumsily moved into Tibetan country. The Shetsang lamasery had been burned, and to the horror of the Tibetans quite a number of the monks had been killed. Then, while members of the Shetsang tribe—both nomads and farmers—fled far up into the higher steppe country, the Chinese army, uncertain just what to do next and harassed by constant sniping, had camped in the Samtsa valley not far from the chief's village.

Such were the bare facts, but rumor rode through Lhamo on flying hooves a dozen times a day. New fears came with every band of refugees. They packed their belongings on cattle and moved, with the general hardihood typical of the Tibetans and a magnificent disregard of the weather, into unknown country. Successive rumors fell over each other: the Chinese army was on the move; the Chinese army had determined to burn every lamasery in Tibetan country and the two at Taktsang Lhamo were next; the Shetsang troops were defeated and they themselves were coming to loot as they fled; the twelve tribes of the Southern Plain were coming to protect the lamaseries. This last prospect, that of

these wild, lawless, plundering protectors, was only one degree less terrifying than the prospect of a hostile Chinese army. Such were the reports. No wonder everyone in Lhamo was worried and there was good reason why our place had not been stoned for two nights running.

Much of all this was in my mind as I walked toward the house of Stretch Ears Jamtzen. I found him surrounded with hastily packed belongings, grimly counting rifle cartridges. He greeted me shortly yet I was sure that something like relief had shown for a second in his face.

"If they come," he said decisively, "all this"—his wide-armed gesture took in the confusion of belongings that filled the room—"will go to your place. Maybe it will be safe? I wonder. . . ."

"Maybe," I answered rather doubtfully. I wondered too. Retreating Tibetan troops and victorious Chinese soldiers were equally hazardous but I nodded agreement. "At any rate," I told Stretch Ears, "your things will be as safe as mine. Bring all of them. I will stay and protect my house and things. The Chinese will listen to me."

I wasn't sure they would; yet generally they had in those days before I came to Lhamo: Li Sung Kong's troops at the sack of Taochow, Chi Si Chang's troops after the battle of Kong Chang, the rebel Moslem cavalry in the streets of Old City—again and again at such times soft words of Chinese politeness, luscious epigrammatic compliments and greetings together with dashes of Western gall, making it seem that all *was* well, had won a hearing. And all *had* been well.

Jamtzen put aside his cartridges and said emphatically: "If you stay here you will bring great good to all Lhamo. Even to Gurdu, who wouldn't give you a place. I know. I have heard from the traders how you can speak to the Chinese officials and generals and how even the bandits listen, for you have face. But the people of these lamaseries do not know, and some are now saying that you bring no good to the community. If you do this you will bring much good and your friends will be glad. Accept for keeping all they bring to you for keeping, but," he looked at me pleadingly, "take mine first."

I had once saved a band of Moslem women and children from the murderous insistence of snarling Chinese militia. I remembered sitting on the doorsteps of the big courtyard with my rifle across my knees, mixing blistering invective and Confucian epigrams. To save mere belongings might not be so hard. At least they would not weep and scream and startle one's nerves at the wrong moment. Stretch Ears and I talked on about the strength of our walls and gates, and how close the Chinese army might be, until a messenger from the Ombo came seeking Jamtzen and, to my surprise, seeking me. We were to come with him, he ordered.

The summons, we found, was to a council meeting held on the lawnlike border of the stream. I was accorded a rather lowly place in the circle. Friends of mine—white-haired Dongtro Jamtso, Trinlan and others—flashed covert smiles of greeting and encouragement, but a considerable number of ecclesiastical noses were lifted a bit higher as I took my place.

Two subjects were under discussion. One was the sending of a delegation to act as peacemakers between the Chinese general and the Tibetans; and the other considered ways and means of preserving the lamasery if the Chinese army should suddenly march to Lhamo and quarter itself there. Long periods of Tibetan oratory followed. One after another, the dignitaries took the floor in turn, meticulously following the arrangement of the circle. It became evident that although the delegation was organized and ready to go, there were no real plans for action if the Chinese should come. A confused mixture of fear and hatred produced an odd vacillation of attitude. They wanted both to stay and fight it out and to flee and leave everything to the Chinese soldiery. My turn finally came to say something, and the ombo in a noncommittal way—scornful or friendly, I could not tell—signaled me to speak.

The delegation to the Mukring (the Samtsa chief) and the Chinese general was none of my affair, so I spoke of what I was prepared to do if and when the Chinese troops came. I could speak to them, I said, and not be afraid. Under Chinese law my place would be inviolate; no soldier would dare enter the big gate. I was willing to stake everything on the peace of Taktsang Lhamo. If houses were to be burned I would say to burn mine first, if soldiers were to be turned loose to loot, let them first loot my place. With such words and insistence I would plead for Lhamo because I had the face to meet and the language to speak to any Chinese general.

A murmur of approval rose from my friends—a murmur

not unmixed with sniffs of incredulity as certain priestly noses went even higher.

Then, to my surprise, the ombo spoke: "If you can speak to the Chinese general, speak now. Go with the delegation who very much fear to meet him. Interpret their words into Chinese—speak for them. The party leaves tomorrow. Will you go with them, Akku Sherab Dzondri?" The ombo's hands turned out, palms upward, in polite compliment—scornful or friendly, I still could not tell—and this time a louder murmur of approval went around the ring.

And that is how it came about that I rode with the official diplomats and ambassadors of the lamaseries as one of a delegation that sought peace for the Tibetans. The leaders of the party were mostly of the fanatical faction who had made no attempt to conceal their dislike of me. Stretch Ears had not been chosen because of his long-standing quarrel with the Mukring. Dongtro Jamtso had begged off, pleading age, but he told me it was really because he feared the Chinese. Only among those of lower rank in the delegation—younger monks who cared little about the conflict of faiths—did I find simple friendliness. In general I was treated with a disdainful, barely polite aloofness. I was merely the interpreter to render Tibetan oratory into good Chinese—a difficult enough task.

However there was no overt unpleasantness. We were provisioned out of the lamasery supplies—extra pack animals and caravan men were furnished even for me—and we traveled in style with fancy tents and extra rugs. Our camps

were elaborate. Yet as we came near Samtsa, and met Tibetan refugees of every kind and degree, tales of Chinese frightfulness cast a distinct damper on the spirits of the party. When we approached the outskirts of the Mukring's village, it was feared we would meet Chinese scouts or outposts and I was asked to ride ahead. From the height on which it was located the camp of the Chinese army overlooked the road but did not block it, and the precaution was really unnecessary.

The Mukring had been informed of our coming, and when our camp was made we went first to pay our respects to him. Tibetan troops camped in the fields outside the village, and guards barred our way into the house-yard of the chief until orders came from him signifying official cognizance of our arrival. The Mukring himself fondled a Mauser automatic as he talked. Certainly he said with most obvious emphasis, he, the Mukring, was making war. While he received us, and his reception was none too cordial, he constantly interrupted himself to give orders about the dispatch of Tibetan scouts to co-operate with the Chinese troops.

All formal Tibetan conferences have one thing in common: sententious oratory in large doses. This one was no exception. Our presents had scarcely been acknowledged when the Mukring, in answer to a leading question, told his story and enlarged upon his case. He discussed in detail the victories of his allies, the Chinese, and enlarged upon their military might. Completely absorbed, he gave orders to his troops and seemingly paid little more than cavalier

attention to the speeches made by our two *skuntsub* (official ambassadors). However, in spite of his preoccupations, I noticed that the Mukring had been watching me rather intently. Suddenly he raised me from the obscurity I occupied—no Chinese interpreter was needed here—by interrupting a specially impressive rhetorical turn with the words: "Let the foreigner speak. Let Sherab Dzondri say what we should do. He is the only one to whom the great Chinese commander of thousands of soldiers, with machine guns and earth-shaking cannon, will pay any attention. I would not dare introduce you tomorrow if it were not that the foreigner is with you. Ask him what to say to the Chinese general who understands not our Tibetan words, but talks of reason, political principle and things we do not know."

These words marked the formal end of the audience and we were dismissed. Back at our camp, while the menials hurried with the making of the evening meal, the members of the delegation gathered for council. But before anyone had spoken—for no one had finished even his first bowl of tea—the clear sounding of bugles broke the quiet of the Tibetan valley and shattered the calm of the council ring. One after another the bugles, sweet and clear, took up the evening call. But the Tibetans shuddered as if it were the wail of the dead. The sound of bugles arouses profound dread and distaste among them. Then, as the harsh shouting of the Chinese "—one, two, three, four"—echoed in quick drill commands, the precedence of the council ring was broken. The leader turned to me anxiously.

"You know about the Chinese," he said, "what shall we say to the commander of many soldiers when we meet him tomorrow?"

At the moment I had no clear idea and was forced to leave that question up in the air.

Next day the meeting was postponed by the Chinese general—good psychology—but when word to come was finally given, the general put on a good show. We rode through massed infantry, rows of machine guns and batteries of trench mortars, and as we passed, bugles sounded throughout the camp. I could see my Tibetan companions fairly shiver in their saddles. A bodyguard armed with submachine guns ringed the open space where the conference tent was pitched.

I had worried and wondered for hours. True, I had come merely as an interpreter, to put the arguments and persuasions of the would-be arbitrators into proper Chinese, but the words of the Samtsa chief and the workings of circumstance had combined to place me in a position of peculiar responsibility. I well knew that if it had not been for a newly awakened hope that I really could speak to the Chinese military—a hope that I actually did have face—the delegation would have turned homeward with the first sounding of the hated bugles the night before. How was I to know that the sudden meeting with a foreigner far up in Tibetan country might not seem like an added aggravation to some harassed officer who, nursing a dim grievance about "unequal treaties" and "Western imperialism," might

have more than a touch of zenophobia? He might simply tell me to take my passport and go about my business, leaving him to deal out Chinese vengeance on a group of Tibetans in whom he chose to see only a convenient collection of enemies.

As we grouped together before entering the tent, the muttered Tibetan prayers of the sweating ecclesiastics, now praying with a new fervor, and the sudden anxious questionings addressed to me, revealed that the delegation was in a blue funk. I didn't blame them. While we rode into the camp plenty of *sotto voce* comment had threatened from all sides. The monks had not known enough Chinese to understand exactly but when the rosary and priestly regalia of one of the luckless monks of Shetsang had been displayed one needed no knowledge of Chinese to sense the implications. Uneasy questions rose around me. Were they safe among all these Chinese soldiers? And what did I think? I indeed hoped they were safe, but I didn't know what to think.

When we entered the tent I was astonished to see who it was that sat on the rugs at the far end. With silken gown, Mauser pistol, straw hat on the back of his head, and a long cigarette holder in his mouth he presented a strange sight. A month-old beard proclaimed the hardships of campaigning. It was Cheng Lu Chang himself: Cheng Lu Chang, with whom I had swapped compliments and bandied Chinese puns when we had feasted together at the defense commissioner's *yamen* (official residence) over a year before.

Because I was in Tibetan garb and among a delegation that from policy he affected to ignore, Cheng Lu Chang did not recognize me until I spoke. When I did, his response was instant. Then I was sure everything was well. He fairly hugged me as he talked, patting my shoulder. In his extreme cordiality I read, far back of all his massed infantry, rows of machine guns and batteries of trench mortars, the dilemma of an officer who had gone as far as he wished to go and was looking for an excuse to turn back.

But, for the sake of face the speechmaking had to go on. The horses and Tibetan broadcloth brought as gifts must be presented and received with due formality. Clear-cut peace terms did not develop, however, from these overtures; the delegation received only a written statement of terms and authority to continue their good efforts. The real object of the trip was attained later, when in an aside, as he still patted my shoulder, the General told the delegation that, because the foreigner lived in Lhamo and had said words in his ear and because they, the ambassadors, had come to pay their respects and best intentions, he would spare their lamaseries. He would not even come to stay, but would go around Lhamo for fear of frightening the people too much with the might of the "emperor's household" as the "emperor's trusted statesman marched to exterminate the rebellious Tibetans." Such was the interpretation by his official interpreter when he rendered it into Tibetan.

The members of the delegation stuck out their tongues to their utmost limits and held their hands palms outward. Everyone made a speech. The official interpreter made two

or three and finally the interview was over. Once more we rode through the camp but now no soldier shouted impudence of any kind. Even the bugles, sounding to signal our departure, no longer made the monks shiver, and there were grins of pleasure on their faces as the outposts gave us their salutes.

Later I sat in my tent waiting till time for the evening meal, more than hungry, and realizing that with our meat supply all gone it would be a very frugal one. Since my return I had talked with no one and the camp had been very quiet. Now just as quietly, my caravan leader parted the tent flaps. "Someone wishes to speak," he announced with ceremony. At that, the young attendant of the Sechu ambassador appeared. On the downward trip he had been one of the friendly ones—in fact, quite hail-fellow-well-met. Once, when we had roped a load together, he had slapped my back with rough—albeit slightly condescending—friendliness. Now his tongue hung out, his hands turned out, his back was bent and, although his eyes were unsubdued all else was punctilious and meek while words of acclamation poured from his lips. I salvaged from the complimentary verbiage only the lone fact that the two skuntsub waited for me in the big tent. Might he carry my honorable bowl?

In the big tent there was spread a Tibetan feast; mostly boiled mutton and sausage. My place of honor was tacitly assigned between the two skuntsub although I tried my best to take my usual seat far around in the ring. *"Pep . . . pep . . . bzhug . . . bzhug"* ("Come . . . come . . . sit . . . sit . . ."), they urged in chorus until I took the place and the meal

began. The young priest—eyes still unconquered—whispered as he served me: "We never knew who you were before. So great. But at least you are our foreigner. You belong to Sechu, not Gurdu."

Politeness placed only a temporary bar on unrestrained high spirits. The Samtsa chief had sent the meat in congratulation, and in the eating of it we congratulated each other on the success of our mission. Whatever pique there might have been in the hearts of some members of the delegation had been overwhelmed in the relief and joy of success. While we ate, and with shouts of laughter, they told of their fears and panics in the Chinese camps. Some were amazed at the machine guns and trench mortars but others —the canny ones with perhaps some experience in campaigning—once over their fright, questioned the real fighting worth of the Chinese troops. Many of the Chinese were very slight and looked like little boys to the burly Tibetans.

In the midst of the discussion there came a sudden interruption from outside the tent. After some argument, four Chinese soldiers entered the shadowy edge of the tent space but would not let the light fall on them. After a pause they explained in broken Tibetan that they had ammunition for sale. Without more ado clip after clip was bought up by the Tibetans at bargain prices. It was evident that some of the rank and file also knew that they would never loot the lamaseries of Taktsang Lhamo and preferred to convert into silver dollars the ammunition that would later be reported as fired at the wild Tibetans.

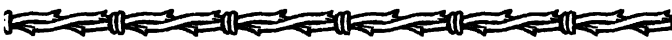
When the furtive peddlers had departed the tent flaps

were thrown back so we could watch the Chinese camp and, perhaps so that any other commercially minded sentries could find their way to our camp with greater ease.

At one outpost a bugle started to blow; the calls echoed from post to post around the camp. The latent fear of those bugles was reflected in the relief expressed by the delegation that because the foreigner had face with the Chinese general the sound of those bugles would never come to Lhamo.

I too was sure that they would not come this time, not because of promises the Chinese had made but because of the uncertainty I had seen in Cheng Lu Chang's eyes. And I was sure, too, of one more thing: it would be a long time, if ever, before big stones from Tibetan slings would again hum out of the dark into our courtyard like vicious bumble bees. The peace delegation had at least found peace for me and mine. With a flash of amusement I wondered whether Stretch Eyes was still packing his stuff preparatory to moving into our place. The bugles blew on but none of us cared. We were to start back before they sounded at dawn and, best of all, they would not blow at Taktsang Lhamo.

XIII



A Tibetan Hunt

A sudden sound like thunder drumming in my ears woke me, and I turned quickly on my saddle pillow. When I raised my head the sound ceased, but when I rested my head on the saddle the hurrying vibrations still came from hundreds of hooves, large and small, which thudded on the frozen ground in the cattle pens and lanes outside. Within the sod hut it was still dark, except for light from the ghostly blue flames of the cow-chip fire that seemed to radiate from the heavy smoke cloud above rather than to rise from the embers beneath. The long smoke hole in the roof showed faintly gray, and I knew it was broad daylight outside where horses, sheep and cattle hurried to pasture.

"Are you awake?" asked Slab Face Rinchen's daughter as she came in and fanned the fire. Now the blue flames leaped far up into the curtain of smoke. "Was your sleeping place comfortable?" she queried politely. I assured her it had been. She hastily picked my bowl from those set in a row on the edge of the ash pit, filled it with tea, kneeled

and gravely presented it to me. This was my early tea, and when I had drunk it I got up, bearing my bedding with me, for I had slept wrapped in my Tibetan sheepskin coat. I had only to put my boots on and draw the girdle closely around my hips to be fully dressed. Even so Rinchen's daughter was already on her way out of the tent with a tiny dipper of water in her hand. I followed.

The sun seemed enormous through the winter haze of dust as it rested on the edge of the sky line. Its level rays slanted across the plain, alive with the herds of horses, cattle and sheep all moving away from the cluster of sod huts and cattle pens that was the winter encampment of Slab Face Rinchen of Bu. Although it was still early in November the air was bitterly cold, and the wind that was just beginning to stir with the rising of the sun blew about my ears.

Yet I had come, perforce, from the dark warmth of the hut that I might, by Tibetan standards, start the day aright. Washing one's hands and face was a strangely perfunctory ritual. A thin trickle of cold water from the tiny dipper, caught in cupped hands and hastily distributed over part of the face, made but a superficial impression on the accumulated soot, grease, and butterfat. Again and again, when I had been inclined to skip the tantalizing gesture until I could get a basin of hot water later in the day, I was marched into the bitter wind by host, hostess, or one of the daughters of the tent, and I never had the courage to earn the reputation of being dirty by adamant refusal.

Slab Face approached as I finished wiping my face with a Tibetan towel—the end of my girdle—and followed me back into the hut. Of all the varying winter shelters of the n mads—from the Spartan-like cold of a tent among the "twelve clans" to the warmer structures of fencing and wattle in Samtsa and Rzakdumba—the sod huts of Bú, low, thick-walled and with an entrance that made a right-angle turn, were the warmest. It was in this warmth, with a sense of well being, that we sat down to breakfast. As I fished yak hairs out of the butter floating on my tea and greased my face with it—the finishing touch to a Tibetan toilet—Slab Face outlined the plans for the day.

I had made the ride from Lhamo to Bu because Slab Face had sent word that gazelle were both fat and plentiful since the tribe had newly come back to the winter encampment. I, he had said, was to come and shoot some. Now, with his sharp face eager and intent, he told where gazelle had been seen in large flocks and discoursed on the pleasure of a day's hunting.

"How many gazelle will your horse carry?" he questioned somewhat challengingly.

I countered with the story of how my good horse Ngoncha had once carried me and four gazelle back to camp.

"Then," said he, "I'll take two bags for the meat and it doesn't much matter that I don't have my rifle any more. I had to sell that, so all depends on your gun today. That is all right: you have plenty of ammunition, and I can do the cutting up of the game."

Slab Face's two saddle bags—woven of mixed wool and yak hair—v·ere stiff with grease and blood, and I was a bit taken aback to have the success or failure of the hunt rest precariously on my 250-3000 Savage and my willingness to scatter ammunition over the open steppe. Therefore, I suggested that all the game we got could very well be carried whole, tied on our horses, but Slab Face's answer was both emphatic and somewhat cryptic.

"Not by the Body of the Buddha!" he said. "We don't wish to share what we shoot with everyone we meet. You just take your bowl. The kettle and kettle stuff *I* will look after."

Into one side of the saddle bag he packed a good supply of the best sort of fuel—dried sheep manure—and in the other half he placed the bellows, kettle, butter box, cheese bag, tsamba bag, a sheep stomach full of some sort of liquid, and finally coiled a yard or so of sausage around his hand and then stuffed it somewhere in between the butter box and cheese bag. That was notice to me to finish my tea drinking. Someone outside calling, "Rinchen, Rinchen, are you going today?" seemed to hurry him in his preparations.

To my relief, when we finally battled clear of the encampment dogs, Rinchen and I were alone. Hunting with a large party of Tibetans is more or less a comic opera affair. The participants, half minded to organize a raid or seek trouble of some sort, stirred by the staccato cadence of fast-moving hooves and the occasional sound of shooting, keep their minds with difficulty on the mere pursuit of game.

Compared with the activity and movement that had hung dust clouds across the face of the sun at sunrise, the encampment and vicinity seemed practically deserted. Far out on the steppe an irregular crawling movement on the sky line showed where the herds of Slab Face's encampment and the other encampments of Bu were scattering to graze. And as we rode, on various points of that horizon, wavering shreds of smoke marked the setting of the herdsman's fires on the outer fringe of the grazing cattle. Gazelle were nearer to the encampment than those herds—again and again patches of yellow and white flitted across our course. But Slab Face kept steadily on, evidently intending that our hunting should take place beyond where the herds grazed. I was perfectly content that it should be so, and paid little attention to the trail except to keep my horse close behind Slab Face's.

Suddenly he pulled his mount up short, shouting and waving his arms above his head. The noise of other shouting broke in upon my wandering thoughts. I saw, about a hundred yards away, the smoke of a camp fire climbing straight above the steppe and men scattering away from it. Two of them stooped under hobbled horses, frantically pulling the hobbles loose. Others started to run and then, seemingly undecided, stood still. But gun muzzles gleamed at us unwinkingly from the grass of the steppe.

My rifle remained on the saddle bow where it had been, but my hands went up as I began to shout what Slab Face had been shouting: "Don't shoot, don't shoot! We're from

Bu. The Garma encampment. Rinchen! Rinchen!" To this I added as my own personal contribution: "His guest! His guest!"

There were some further questionings, but Slab Face had been recognized. We turned slightly off the trail to approach the fire, while the group reassembled. Meanwhile the two men under the horses fumbled hurriedly to re-hobble them. One of the other three was innocent of clothing except for his boots. He had been sitting by the fire with his sheepskin coat wrapped loosely about him, its girdle untied to facilitate his own particular hunting in its long fleece when we had first hailed them. He had literally jumped out of his clothes as he leaped to a position behind the hummock. Now he shivered comically. While he rushed for his coat the other two stood with their rifles in hand, still a bit peevish because of their own panic.

"Rinchen," one complained, "don't you know enough to give clear warning when we are all so fearful of a Golok raid that our scouts are out every day to protect the herds? Why, some from your own encampment are the scouts for today! By the Books, you scared us! You were nearly shot. What are you doing anyway?"

When we explained our plans to hunt gazelle they gave a gleeful yell and announced that they would go with us and drive the game. Ayah, they cried, we'd get so many that we couldn't carry them home. Did the pehling have a good rifle? They knew where the gazelle were like this—and they wiggled their fingers to simulate numbers.

They hardly waited to hear our refusal of their invitation to drink tea, one of them dumping it and straining out the leaves for future use. The man whose girdle had been untied during his hunt for lice pulled it tight with great jerks, and in no time at all they were on horseback. Rather ruefully I thought: "This is becoming more and more like a Tibetan hunt—we'll no doubt scare every gazelle within miles."

But it was a wonderful day for riding, and we moved at a quick trot across the steppe, our spirits rising as we went. The herdsmen were still arguing where the most gazelle would be found when, off toward the eastern hills along the trail of the Sharwa tea caravans, we sighted three men riding toward Bu. They must have seen us at the same time, for they stopped to gaze as we paused to make out who they were. After my announcement that the binoculars showed three horsemen—two guns and a spear—leading a pack mule, a babel of argument broke out among the men of Bu.

The gazelle could wait. Here, they claimed, was something that promised greater diversion than any gazelle hunt. Too many strangers wandered near the Bu encampments with evil intent. That was how the Goloks had made trouble. We should ride up and capture these men. If they were innocent travelers they could be set free later. Why were they traveling in Bu territory without a Buwa guide and escort? Leading a mule, said one, suggested that they were valley people; the steppe people would have a horse.

"By the Twelve Volumes of the Sacred Books," finished the one who had recently been coatless, "too many of these

valley people prowl around and steal our sheep at night! If they are thieves we'll capture them, and if they aren't we'll give them a good scare anyway, for we are four rifles. What fun! Come on!"

There was no stopping them. Keeping my rifle on my back to signify my own peaceful intentions, I rode with the rest of them across the plain toward the strangers. Instinctively, they first tried to run. Then, seeing that we moved much faster than they, and hindered as they were by the pack mule, they stood their ground, holding their weapons with a sort of unwilling readiness that betrayed their panic and fear. To my alarm, and in spite of my protests, the quick tattoo of the trot changed to the smoother rhythm of the gallop and we pounded across the steppe.

It was going too far and I for one would not ride down on three scared men. It needed but one overnervous trigger finger and there was no telling what might happen. However, Ngoncha had the snaffle between his teeth and after my companions began to yell there was no stopping him as our horses flattened out on the last stretch. Three hundred yards . . . two hundred. . . . I remember thinking that regardless of appearances I was glad I was a member of the hunters rather than the hunted—and then two of the men turned to flee. The pack mule shied and, throwing his load, came to a standstill in a tangle of pack ropes. Then we swept around the three making a ring that bristled toward the center with rifles, spears and swords.

Stuttering and stammering with panic, the three strangers

answered the arrogant questioning and challenging of the men of Bu. They told who they were, where they came from, all about their business, and at whose tent door they visited when in Bu. They tactfully offered to pay us to escort them to that tent so that their host might identify them. Even to the most suspicious Tibetan mind they were innocent of any evil intent and replete with the proper credentials: peaceful travelers going their way and, by friendship with members of the Bu tribe, entitled to consideration. Anyway, they had been greatly scared and we had made a gallant charge.

Adroitly, the herdsmen and Slab Face announced the matter closed. The men could go on, with warnings to travel carefully and in no way act as suspiciously as they had done by attempting to run away. The men of Bu were indeed somewhat uneasy and alert since the Golok affair.

"Aren't you the foreigner from Lhamo?" asked one of the men as he dismounted to rerope the pack mule's load.

"Oh, yes, I am just riding with the men of Bu for I am hunting gazelle," I answered, hoping they were not holding anything against me.

Instead they seemed relieved, regarding it quite as a matter of course that the men of Bu should be on the alert and a bit touchy on the subject of strangers. We parted with greetings of the utmost friendliness and again my companions and I ranged the steppe looking for gazelle.

It was finally decided to organize a drive but when it came to finding out who would do the shooting, the owner

of each rifle begged off, pleading lack of ammunition. In the end I was posted in a hollow, flattened out behind a clump of dried hay. One of the herdsmen stayed with me to keep me company and we lay with our ears to the ground. The sound of the thudding of tiny hooves on the frozen surface was a surer indication that gazelle were within range than any glimpses we might get by raising our heads and scaring away the sharp-sighted creatures. Prone as we were, my companion began the tale of the affair with the Goloks.

Quite some time ago, he related, mouth close to the ground, a party of seventeen Goloks traveling on the fringe of the winter grazing range had suddenly attempted to drive off the horse herd of Slab Face's encampment. Although there were only three men at that fire they had good rifles and good horses, and, following hard after the Goloks, had recovered the horse herd, killing three horses and three men and wounding—they thought—others. One of the Goloks—and they were dressed strangely like no tribe Bu had ever known—had lived long enough to tell what tribe he belonged to. It was the Gomangtsang, fifteen days' ride up the Yellow River. And he had died foretelling the sure vengeance of his fellow tribesmen even though the attack on the horse herd in the first place had been a mistake. They had thought it belonged to Gurdu lamasery with whom they had a long-standing feud.

"We men of Bu," continued my new friend, "are brave sons. We only lost one horse and just one of our three herders received a leg wound. But now we all have to be

very careful. It is told that the Goloks are strangely fierce. They can see at night like wild animals and they eat their meat without cooking it."

So interested had we been in the tale that we had forgotten to listen for the drumming of tiny hooves on the frozen steppe, but at this point in the story a sudden startled "woof" brought us both to a sitting position. A handsome buck gazelle stood not more than twenty feet away from us, his nostrils still quivering from his startled snort. In a flash he and the drove for which he had been scout and sentinel were streaking away—a changing blur of yellow and white.

"Too late—too late," lamented my companion, for as Tibetans always shoot from a rest, they seldom attempt running shots. At the same time I sat up with my rifle at my shoulder, and in a burst of shots the 250-3000 vindicated itself to my Tibetan friends. There was enough meat to keep us all busy cutting it up.

The rest of the party raced to the kill and the game was butchered with incredible rapidity; everything being divided into seven equal parts—a fair share for each man. Only by the fact that the skins were added to my allotment was any acknowledgment made that my rifle had done the killing. And the acknowledgment was to the rifle, not to the shooter. The mere thrill of shooting was supposed to be enough reward for a hunter. The skins were for the owner of the rifle and an acknowledgment of the use of ammunition. If I had been using a borrowed gun the skins

would have gone to the owner of the gun, for such is Tibetan hunting custom.

By now we were far from the herds, and the herders, warning Rinchen and me to carry on with a small heart, returned to their fire while Slab Face and I rode on. Once I stalked a lonely buck and got a beautiful head. Once we rode hard at right angles to a running herd, coming near enough to the point where they persisted in crossing our course to get more meat as they passed—though I wasted a good many shots—and then it was more than time for "tea."

Slab Face chose a high bluff by a tributary of the Mechu River and we feasted royally all afternoon. The sausage, toasted in the embers disappeared by inches till it was all gone, the liquid inside the sheep stomach turned out to be zho and between mouthfuls we drank tea. Later we broiled slices of gazelle heart and liver over the fire. But in regard to the broiling, Slab Face waited until I assured him it was my fire and that I would bear the curse of the mountain gods who, it seemed, disliked the smell of broiling meat. They were likely to curse the owner, but not necessarily the users, of the fire over which the broiling was done.

Our horses had been unsaddled to graze more restfully, so we rode no more that afternoon. It was not until the sun was low that we started home. We neither rode straight toward the encampment nor looked for gazelle, but took the wide curve on the outer fringe of the grazing range till time to turn inward toward home.

Our thoughts were far from gazelle and it was only when

seven bucks paraded in silhouette that we stopped. It was a long stalk and I worked myself, face down, for several hundred yards, hunching along like a new and clumsy variety of tumble bug. But at the end of the stalk, the gazelle, for some reason of their own, had gone on. As I sat disgusted, recovering my wind, for some equally inexplicable reason they all came back, moving in a wide arc: seven big bucks following each other proudly in line and moving at a mincing trot. It was a long shot and although the thud of the striking bullet was distinct and loud all seven broke into a gallop at the same instant. Again I turned away in disgust, but two shouts of gratification spun me around just in time to see the last buck in the line fall.

Slab Face rode furiously toward me as I walked up to the fallen animal, and from a different angle another horseman—the one who had shouted the second time—lashed his horse unsparingly as he rode toward us. I knew that one rider meant no danger and stood looking at the prize head of the buck—it bore the finest horns I had ever seen—when Slab Face arrived. Feverishly he set about butchering the carcass but had only half finished when the stranger drew up. Leaving his blown horse some yards away the man staggered up to us with loud shouts of congratulation, seized one of the buck's legs and helped Slab Face with the skinning. Unperturbed, he greeted the man most cordially and when the butchering was done divided the meat into three piles giving me at the same time a rather comical look. The sheep herder thanked us for the meat, told us where he had

seen some more gazelle and rode off with a final cheery wave of tne hand.

"Your meat is never your own until it is butchered," grunted Slab Face. "I hurried but couldn't cut it up fast enough, and until it is cut up anyone who arrives to help in the butchering must have a share. That, too, is Tibetan custom." I now knew why he had objected to my carrying whole gazelle on my horse. It was an open invitation to share with all comers.

The sun dropped rapidly and darkness followed hard on the herds that straggled toward the encampment. Between ourselves and the edge of the horizon where the sun would finally flatten and disappear, the small Bu Mtso (Bu Lake) was a sheet of flame across which wild fowl drove with slanted wings, seeking resting places on the broad fringe of ice that already took up half the lake's surface. The cries of the wild-fowl mingled with the lowing of cattle, the peculiar piglike grunt of the yak and the neighing of mares seeking their colts as herds and riders merged near the encampment. But above all these sounds a sudden burst of conversation behind me caught my attention.

"So. You have been out scouting all day for Golok raiders. It was your turn? But how did you do it without a rifle?" I could not catch Slab Face's answer. The voice went on: "Oh, his rifle was good? You shot two saddlebags of meat? That is good, very good, to combine scouting and hunting. He must have much ammunition."

The voice, whosever it was, was right. The saddle bags

were full of gazelle meat and I had two exceptionally fine heads. There would be great feasting and congratulation in Slab Face Rinchen's hut that night. And yet I was not altogether sure just what I had been doing all day—hunting gazelle, chasing suspicious characters, scouting for Golok raiders or just having a general good time by a camp fire that overlooked all approaches. Maybe all those items entered into having a Tibetan good time, I decided, as the dogs began to bark and threaten at the edge of Slab Face's encampment.

XIV

Partridges and Robbers

Ngoncha, my big piebald, staggered and stopped with a gasping snort, all four feet braced. He was utterly blown from the swift climb, but the crest of the ridge was only a few feet away, and I crawled forward leaving him to wheeze and puff behind me.

Far below, along the irregular band of the trail, tramped and cropped from out the untouched pasture lands—for this was no man's land and the black tents were never hung on this mountainside—the caravan straggled along slowly at the beginning of the ascent: the horses and the two pack mules of our party moving with stops and starts as they grazed along behind the slower yak caravan of our Tibetan fellow travelers.

Even the pass where the trail I had just traveled cut a notch in the brow of the hill was far below. Above me broken cliffs of gray limestone rose out of the steep meadows. For a moment what seemed like the moving of wild sheep across the face of the cliff caught my eye, and then I

turned to the scene that rose bit by bit as I edged forward in the grass and focused the binoculars.

The near side of the valley was empty, and on the opposite side the trail climbed an even higher slope to disappear and reappear between the cliffs and ridges of Amni Hwargan. Far above, the fantastic quiver shrine of the robbers' god, stacked with giant arrows, crowned the highest peak. The upper end of the valley was a great half-circle of rock slides that ringed alpine meadows, where like dark green shadows rhododendron thickets were scattered in a haphazard pattern.

It was, for all its visual splendor, a region of ill-repute. Every season at least two or three robberies took place. Only the year before, my supply caravan had fought a sort of rear-guard action across the valley that now lay so empty and still in the October sunshine. And it was through that maze of hidden valleys and jumbled cliffs that Stretch Ears and I had once ridden along little-used snow-blocked trails in the depth of winter because the Drangwa had been camped in force along the caravan route.

Because of all this I now searched the slopes slowly, straining to catch the movement of horses across the mountainsides, or the glint of gun barrels in the thickets. I turned my glasses again and again to where the short cut to the Drangwa villages made a scar along the highest ridge among the cliffs. There I picked out a herd of gazelle—white and yellow shadows flitting with patternless change—and three roe deer shoulder-deep in the scrub. The lenses brought the

opposite slopes so close that I could see movement in the grass; either hares or partridges. But in all that vast scene, filled with every shade of gray, green, russet and gold, I found no telltale sign of danger. The ringing silence filled me with vague unease. It would have been something of a relief to be able to exchange apprehension for definite threat. My caravan was halfway to the pass and as I fixed the glasses on it I could see the faces of the riders turned toward me. Knowing that my signal was long overdue, I waved them to come on and led Ngoncha along the ridge down toward the pass.

When I rejoined the party the Tibetan members were praying noisily as they climbed the trail toward their first view of Amni Hwargan. Their leader, the steward of Gurdu, asked me what the glasses had shown. My report gave little reassurance and their prayers droned on even after we had crossed the valley and climbed halfway up the opposite slope.

Their prayers changed to curses as a large covey of partridges crossed the trail, dodging and running in all directions but refusing to fly. Instantly the Tibetans were off their horses, searching for stones which they threw with all their strength at the darting brown and speckled creatures. No good nomad Tibetan will eat birds of any sort. The vulture's claws perform the offices of burial for the Tibetans, and because all birds have claws they are all taboo as food. Another reason is that the taking of life is in itself a sin. In the Tibetans' minds that sin is nicely balanced against the

benefit derived—the quantity of meat available for food. By that rule it is a much greater sin to kill small things for food than large; the proportion of the benefit derived (small) to the sin committed (great) is out of balance. Yet here were priests who never killed anything if they could help it flinging stones with the most murderous intent. And all because partridges had crossed our trail. By an odd twist in phonetics the little *shakwa,* or partridge, foreshadowed *chakwa* (robbers) on the trail within the same day. I knew about the superstitition but smiled to see the steward throwing rocks with such ardor. Suddenly he remembered that I was in the party.

"Come on, Sherab Dzondri," he cried, "you eat them. Get out that gun with two barrels and kill some. If any are killed the bad luck goes— But, mouth of hell! How they run when we throw stones!"

All around, hidden in the grass, the little birds were clucking and twittering. We did not have a scrap of meat for the evening pot, and fall steppe-partridge fried in butter is a dish for epicures. While the caravan came to a complete stop I collected quite a few of the plump little birds, to the immense relief of the Tibetans for whom the phonetic omen of shakwa versus chakwa had been broken by my twenty-gauge.

Still I was not altogether easy in my own mind about robbers and took advantage of every natural lookout along the long ridge of the Hwargan. I raked the branch canyons under the shrine of the mountain god with the glasses, and

even searched far down the main valley where the first spruce forests mark the beginning of the wooded country, but I did not pick up a single sign.

Dusk was filling the valley bottom as we finished the long descent. With the first of the series of "stone gates" or gorges passed, the shadow of Amni Hwargan began to lift from our thoughts even though it was too dark to go very far down the valley. We had only the last few minutes of half-light in which to make camp before night finally closed in.

Our Tibetan companions chose their campsite about fifty yards above mine and my family's in a little branch valley, and we stacked our loads just where it joined the main valley. Making camp was easy. It was past the season of the rains so there were no tents to pitch. Firewood was plentiful and handy, and the flames were soon licking at the pots while one of the caravan boys made quick work of fixing the partridges. Once or twice my dog, Jamar, growled uneasily. The back trail turned sharply behind a great rock only about fifty yards away and, beyond that, clumps of willows along the stream filled the valley with a vague threatening menace. Perhaps it would have been better to have gone on down the valley through the second gorge. And perhaps if we had threaded our way through the piled-up confusion of boulders and stones of all sizes and shapes without mishap, we would have then been safe from the possibility of being followed, for no horseman would attempt that passage in the dark. It might be that Jamar

was having the jitters, I thought. Tibetan dogs often do have them, just like their masters. These possibilities flickered vaguely in my mind and then flared to blinding certainty as reality burst swiftly upon us from out the dark.

With a clatter of hooves riders swung around the rock, dropping off their horses as they came. Jamar's uncertainty vanished and he lunged, taking care, however, to leap back warily from the flashing swordblades. One of the robbers was already at the stacked loads, grabbing the rolls of raincoats and blankets.

"Take them all. They are ours!" he shouted.

My action was blindly instinctive but based on two factors: one, the bitterly regretful realization that I had been caught napping; the other, a desperate confidence in the effectiveness of the unexpected. After all I was a pehling—a foreigner—who might attempt and get away with the unpredictable. So I, too, leaped for the stack, feeling inside my Tibetan coat for my Luger and hoping that the boys would retrieve our unguarded condition.

"Hah, foreigner, it is you!"

"Who are you?" I shouted.

"Chakwa, by the Buddha!"

"Out of the way!"

"If you dare—"

"Look out for his hand!"

Da-whay's childish scream of terror cut into my consciousness as a young Tibetan swung a broadsword and struck at me through the crowd. But they were still bluffing,

for the flat of the blade slapped against my sheepskin coat and then I got my hand free, the rough handle of the Luger bringing a most definite assurance. The robbers stood back and a number of rifle bolts rattled. To one side, almost outside my field of vision, I was dimly aware of a spear in the dark and the flesh on my ribs crawled. But behind me I heard a guttural warning in Tibetan, "Back with the spear," then Dorje Mtso's level voice saying in English, "Its all right now," and finally my caravan leader, "We're ready, chief."

As I stepped back I tripped on a saddle and went down. But above me the muzzles of three rifles and a shotgun moved in little warning circles and beyond the stacked baggage the robbers still rattled their rifle bolts.

Into this tense situation rushed three Tibetans—our companions of the trail.

"These are our companions! Friends of the lamasery. You dare not! Back, back—put up your rifles! I am the steward of the Gurdu lamasery. . . ."

There was more rattling of rifle bolts but I got to my feet and, without bothering to ask for my rifle, added the persuasion of the Luger to the threat of rifle fire. The Gurdu steward and his companions harangued and expostulated with the bandits and presently the two groups moved away together toward the other campfire. We hastily stacked the camp gear nearer to us, in a little parapet, and sat down to attend to the partridges that were sizzling in the butter. Poor little shakwa. Their untimely demise at the crossing of our ways hadn't prevented their phonetic affinities, the

chakwa, from following our trail. But at least they made good eating, though more than usually dry and hard to swallow just then.

It had not been a large band of robbers. Only eight men with five rifles and a spear or two. But how many more might there be, not far up the valley, waiting some signal to move down to where the willows stalked the trail? Yet for the moment our bluff had worked. The only thing to do now was to keep on bluffing.

At my hail the steward of the lamasery came hurrying through the dark. The grass rustled surprisingly and it seemed to me that someone else was lurking nearby beyond the circle of light. Whatever I said I would say with additional loudness and force, I thought, and waited until the cook had filled the steward's bowl with tea.

"This is not a good affair," I began. "I am afraid there will be much trouble." The steward's eyes sought mine with sudden worry but I went on: "Yes, of course there will be much trouble—trouble for the Drangwa. I have traveled from Labrang to Ngawa and lived among the tribes of the Southern Steppe for years but never have I been so insulted as I have been today. Who are *We*? The foreigners. In Chinese country we are guests of the 'emperor's household' (the government) in Nanking. In Tibetan country: we are friends of Meitsang, guests of chiefs, beloved of the Buddha. And they dare to attack my camp and frighten my child!"

I was remembering the rolling periods of Stretch Ears' oratory and the vigorous logic of Duggur's argument.

Echoes of their crisp phrases and neat turns of invective sang in my memory and crept into my speech. I went on to show our advantage: rifles covering the only outlet of the cul-de-sac of the little valley; behind us a bank beyond which two jumps would give us the double protection of darkness and cover, and from which our fire would sweep the firelit exit. I told of my anger but mentioned at last my mercy and, most of all, my respect for him, the Gurdu steward, at whose campfire the robbers had taken refuge. In view of all these things, I said, I was disposed to let them off easily. Let them come with him, the steward, I said, bringing a gift of atonement in their hands and on his face I would agree to forget the whole matter. Otherwise I could not call the matter closed but would have to act. So I spoke, enunciating clearly and making my voice carry as best I might, although at moments I found my mouth as dry as when I had been eating the fried partridges.

The steward listened very gravely and said, "I will tell them." He rose to go but there no longer seemed any worry in his look. In a short time he was back, and as he spoke I felt that he too was speaking partly for the benefit of an unseen audience.

The robbers, he declaimed, who had been watching the trail for days were fierce and desperate. They could not very well go home until they had something in their hands and all afternoon they had watched us. The main band, seventy strong, was waiting up in the mountains. They had lain in ambush on the trail for days. There was rumor that a

big Chinese trading caravan was due any day. For the sake of their ride down to our camp, and that they might go and tell their companions we were not the caravan of Chinese, they must have something. Therefore, if I would pay them thirty pounds of flour that they might have some good food, and give them ten ounces of silver that the eight men might divide, they would ride back and stop the other seventy who were coming along the pass that leads from Drangwa.

I was secretly amazed at the smallness of the demand. But outwardly indignant, and with the utmost conviction I could muster, I refused. Let the dog-headed Drangwa try their worst, I roared. They could never get out of the valley! The way they handled their rifles revealed that some didn't even have cartridges. And even if they did get out and brought back their seventy companions we would still fight. What Tibetan tribe would care to bear the guilt of having wiped out the foreigner and his family when retribution from a far land drew near?

"So go and tell them to hurry," I ended. "We are tired and want to rest. Whatever it is—fight or apologize—tell them to hurry."

As the steward left, my caravan leader leaned close to mutter: "Well spoken, chief, but don't press it too far."

Back and forth went the steward on his mission, doing considerable orating on his own account, and finally three unarmed men came with him to our fireside. They were sorry that in the dark they hadn't made out who I was but had thought we were Chinese. And as for atonement, they

were poor men far from home and had nothing in their hands so I must excuse them, accepting the apology just the same.

On my part I placed half a pound of tea leaves in their hands that they might have something to put in the pot for their late tea, but it was to be clearly understood the gift was not for protection. A few minutes later we exchanged farewells and they rode around the rock where the trail turned.

"Carry on peacefully!"

"Yes, carry on peacefully!" we shouted back and forth.

Then they were out of sight. Jamar followed them to the rock, at a safe distance, to tell them what he thought of them, and stood watching for a long time. At length he seemed satisfied and came back to camp.

Would they come back? What about the band of seventy? How much security could we count on in the dark? What should we do? The steward turned up his thumbs and stuck out his tongue in commendation of the way we had held up our end of the argument. But he didn't seem to know any of the answers to those questions. The gorge, impassable in the dark, was only a few hundred yards down stream so there seemed little hope of being able to move to advantage. We could only set a watch and make arrangements for a good defense, just in case, and as best we could.

The rock where the trail turned was an ideal post, and there we set a watch, while Jamar circled and sniffed and

often barked, but with no great conviction. The night was unusually dark. Not a star was to be seen, and one's eyes responded only so far to the challenge of the darkness, even after the fire died down. Where the stream and trail kept company, shadowy riders rode toward us again and again to meet and merge with the willows of the water course, and from there, after a pause, they would resume their ride. The hollow chuckling of the stream and their hoofbeats sounded in unison.

The weather was lowering but unusually mild, and sometime after midnight the air was full of big wet flakes. For once their wetness and the stark discomfort they forecast for the tentless camp brought a sense of relief which grew stronger as a heavy blanket of wet snow deepened on everything, running in icy rivulets into bedding rolls and makeshift shelters. We were up before a dawn that brought no sense of danger, for the snow was a storm and the white valley with the draped willows was utterly bare.

Once past the gorge of the lower stone gate all our uneasiness vanished, and we rode with our Tibetan companions in a rather congratulatory mood. The steward was not willing to commit himself as to the extent of the danger of the night before but accepted the expression of our gratitude like a man accustomed to receiving his dues.

Only on one aspect of the matter did he have much to say: "Foreigner, you begin to talk like a good Tibetan, indeed, like our friend Stretch Ears Jamtzen. That, and your hand gun, saved you."

I had, however, one more question to ask. "If killing partridges," I said, "when they cross the trail breaks the bad luck, how did robbers get on our trail? Maybe next time I shouldn't shoot any partridges?"

His answer was instant: "You had only to make the gift of eight ounces of tea. You haven't been robbed."

So by all counts what had saved us was the shooting of the partridges, the hand gun, and talking like Stretch Ears Jamtzen. But when we returned to Lhamo I took the steward of Gurdu lamasery a present for I felt that he, too, by his efforts had contributed to our safety.

Months later I found another item to add to the list. I was staying in a Drangwa village as guest of the headman, for I had gone by request to vaccinate the children, when one of the men around the evening hearth fire who had been regarding me rather curiously suddenly said: "Foreigner—you good Tibetan—don't you remember me?"

I had to admit that I didn't although such an admission often offended.

"I was one of the men who came and got the tea that night when you were camped between the stone gates beyond the Hwargan," he said. "There are several of us here." He didn't mention anything about making apology nor did he now appear anything but friendly. "What was it that you held in your hand that night?" he went on, "and was the little boy frightened for long? Well, for a foreigner you talk like a real Tibetan."

Then someone else in the circle cut in: "That about talk-

ing is all right but how did you know that I had no cartridges—that my rifle was empty?"

That question, however, I refused to answer; I just sat, solemn and serious, and looked into the fire. I had found another item to add to the list of reasons for the happy outcome of the affair with the Drangwa robbers, an outcome that helped to keep trails open before us.

XV

Death on the Gora Path

The narrow gorge was filled with the cold shadows of late afternoon, and was piled, too, with the vast confusion of an ice jam through which greenish water seeped in slowly freezing trickles. For Jamtzen and me it had been a hazardous gateway leading from the open steppe to the deep valley bottom of the farming country. Ngoncha, my big piebald, stood dejectedly with the water running down his flanks, freezing into icicles as it ran. From one place on his leg, where he had gashed himself on a hidden rock as he fell, it ran red against the white hair. I hastily stripped my dripping boots from freezing feet and drew out the dank hay while my companion, Stretch Ears, gathered dry replacements in the nearby thickets to furnish me with dry socks. Hay stuffing in the oversize felt-lined boots is the only sort of socks the nomads know. But the boots were soaking, the piebald limped, and the cold shadows darkened in the narrow gorge.

Our boots relined, we hurried along the valley bottom.

Dark spruces came down one wall all the way to the icy bed of the stream. The opposite slope was bare of timber but marked with one or two levels of narrow, terraced fields. A tiny red and white lamasery—so small it was more like a hermitage than a lamasery—was set on the far end of the terrace, and the shoulder of the hill was scored by a narrow path that ran from the lamasery to the valley floor. Beyond that point would be the bridge, and beyond the bridge, Temchok Tsering's home toward which we raced our horses. Dry hay socks or no, my feet were nearly freezing.

Temchok's house was at the lower edge of the village, somewhat turned away from the other houses. The front wall was topped with a great stack of firewood, its lower strata dark and water-stained, rotting into crumbling mold. But all along the top freshly split wood gleamed with sudden whiteness in the dusk. Year by year the stack would be piled higher—as a matter of pride and a mark of affluence—and only under great stress would any of it actually be used for firing.

Once within the shelter of that cordwood rampart, I left the unloading of the horses to Stretch Ears and Temchok's wife while I hurried into the deep gloom of the house, stumbling and feeling my way through the stables and sheep pens that opened into the family room. I was anxious to get where irregular flashes of rosy light promised a fire for my freezing boots and half-frozen feet.

It was not long before a fiercely flaming blaze filled the high-ceilinged room with light as Temchok recklessly piled

on split spruce logs. Fire tongues leaped with excited cracklings. The old man clucked solicitously until I was sure my feet were merely cold and not frosted. Like a true Tibetan host he filled our bowls with butter and tea and saw to it that we were served chunks of boiled meat steaming hot. Then he sat back in an attitude of stately ease, one lean brown hand busied with his rosary while the merest ghost of a twitching about his lips marked the muttering of his prayers.

Temchok Tsering was known as Handsome Fortune Temchok behind his back. I could never understand why he should not be so called to his face, for although most Tibetan nicknames could well start a fight, certainly no one should object to being called Handsome Fortune. He hardly looked his sixty-five years as he sat with his fine, thoughtful face in repose, half turned toward the fire glow. His lean, sunbrowned torso was half out of his sheepskin cloak, draped somewhat like a toga. The steel-gray thatch of his hair curled tenderly around a face that was at once strong and gentle. His son Tamdro, a handsome, somewhat subdued, even faintly overawed young Tibetan did most of the serving. He asked deferentially about our passage of the gorge and if we had seen a leopard that had been haunting the thickets above the ice jam.

When the talk veered to matters connected with hunting, the old man's face suddenly became alive with interest, and he had Tamdro bring his old matchlock for us to see. It was a weapon of odd beauty. The five-foot barrel was of Dam-

ascus steel with delicate filigree of gold in a faint pattern extending from end to end. The full-length wooden stock was covered with stamped leather aged and polished almost like horn. Only where the silver-mounted forked rest was hinged to the stock was it grimed with a brownish crust mixed with hairs.

"Yes," nodded Handsome Fortune as I bent to examine it, "it has drunk the blood and tasted the flesh of many a big stag, thirty-five and forty years ago; for this was the finest gun, and I was the most skillful hunter, in the entire Jangtsa valley. There never was a hunt nor even a raid when they didn't ask me to go. Go ask the old men what Temchok Tsering was like when the men of Jangtsa were called to sit their saddles."

The flutter and muttering of his lips had ceased, his rosary hung untouched while he warmed to his talk and told about the early days and all the excellent shooting he had done with the old matchlock.

"That was long ago," he ended wistfully. "Now the old gun is worth nothing, yet when it was first bought I paid two hundred ounces of silver for it. Just as much as I paid for the gun I now carry." And at his bidding Tamdro lifted down from the antelope-horn pegs on the wall a well cared for Waffenbrik Mauser. The cartridge belt was richly ornamented with coral and silver and the old man touched the clips and then the bolt of the rifle with loving, longing fingers.

At last he looked up and said: "But for thirty years I have only carried a gun and have never shot anything, not even

a fox or a wolf, for I am looking into 'life after this' and must create merit.

"All must be done according to justice. For my sins there must be the payment of merit. That is justice, and I know justice, for am I not the settler of affairs in all the region around Lhamo? So to make that merit I neither hunt nor ride when the men of Jangtsa go to waylay a caravan. I carry the gun only for protection because I who am called Handsome Fortune Temchok would well like to be called Merit Temchok."

And so we talked of religion. He was somewhat scornful of any religion that did not emphasize merit laboriously achieved. To him nothing received merely as a gift could bring peace. It must be bought by way of the prayer wheel, the rosary, the ceaseless muttering of an endless litany and much weary treading of Gora, the magic clockwise circle around the lamasery. To the *must* of inner compulsion he added the *can* of years of effort, restraint and sacrifice. His good resolves were bulwarked behind years of habit and a fine-tested character manned the inner citadel.

By Tibetan standards his wealth, his dutiful industrious son, pleasant capable wife, and beautiful daughter were sure proofs that his efforts were already well crowned with success. In very truth he *was* Handsome Fortune Temchok. Only when he spoke of his daughter did his face darken. She was not in the family circle, and Stretch Ears' sudden fixed stare at me seemed to enjoin silence. I forbore to ask any questions about her.

Next day Temchok had to go act as judge and adminis-

trator of the unwritten law in a case of tangled equities and conflicting desires, but we stayed on in his home for we could neither go on our way nor return. Ngoncha's gashed leg had stiffened till he hobbled painfully on three legs, and my felt-lined boots, soaked through and through, took thirty hours to dry. I was forced to sit by the fire with my feet curled under my big sheepskin cloak and banter the time away with Handsome Fortune Temchok's wife, drinking innumerable bowls of tea the while.

She told me more about the daughter, who was married to a wild good-for-nothing of the village. The young man had gone out of their home with much hard feeling, taking the daughter with him. But he came back again and again to plague them. And as the old lady talked on it seemed to me that there was a sizeable blemish on the handsome fortune of Temchok Tsering.

My boots were dry on the third day and Ngoncha could put his hoof to the ground. When Stretch Ears and I parted from the old man he urged us to return. I sensed that age and handsome fortune had made him lonelier than perhaps he realized. I invited him to come and rest in my guest room whenever he left his valley.

He came sooner than I had expected and he was a changed man. Even in the seclusion of my guest room he leaned his rifle against the wall within reach of his hand and refused to lay off his cartridge belt. He spoke in fearful whispers while the four or five companions who had accompanied him came and went on their errands with an air of haste and importance, their rifles at their saddlebows.

Temchok's face had aged and hardened. All of his sixty five years and more staked their claims in the haggard lines and would not be denied. Peace, poise, and all the visible gifts of handsome fortune that had but lately been so much a part of his presence were gone. Instead, a certain dazed incredulity and horror, even a new grim resolution showed through tragic eyes and in the fierce intentness of every movement. The lean brown hand that held his bowl of tea was still steady, but his lips were too tense to shape the syllables of a litany and his rosary hung idle from his neck.

"Have you heard, Sherab?" he whispered. "Have you heard what I, who am called Handsome Fortune Temchok, did in my old age? I shot him, my son-in-law, the black-hearted scum who was my daughter's husband. I shot him as he stood in the doorway of our home, reviling me and mine. He fell like a stag whose neck is shattered, and never moved. Why should he have come to pour hate on hate? And my rifle was so near!

"So I, who for thirty years haven't even killed a sheep that I might lay up merit, I shot my son-in-law, the father of my grandchild! And now my daughter weeps for him, he who lay in the doorway of the home room. And now what is the use of the merit I have won on the gora path?"

His words were somehow unreal, yet they painted a scene of horrible reality. In the doorway of a room that had been filled with light, warmth and good cheer—a room filled with the intangibles of handsome fortune, merit, character, respect, and security—in the doorway of such a room, the home room, a man lay like a stag with shattered neck, and

all those intangibles vanished. The glow of good cheer darkened swiftly, and fear and retribution rose with ghostly menace from that crumpled figure.

"Then there was fighting," Temchok said. "My relatives came to help me, and his came to fight for him. So, like horse thieves, we had to flee at night. Tamdro went to our friends in Tebu land and I have come here. The lamasery authorities are all my friends, the chiefs too, and big men like Jamtzen. They will perhaps come into the case as arbitrators and I can pay atonement and the affair will be settled. But until they do I must fight and even kill lest I be killed. I wonder," and he glanced around with grim significance, "I wonder just how bullet proof are these walls."

As host, I was harboring a strange guest. There was always the outside possibility that some daredevil avenger would invade even our compound to win vengeance and general acclaim by an utterly reckless coup-de-force. So my relief was even greater than Temchok's, who at times seemed half inclined to fight the feud to the bitter end, when, hours later, his companions returned bringing the steward of the lamasery and good news.

It seemed that the twin lamaseries of Sechu and Gurdu, the eighteen clans of the Tebus, the headmen of the Jangtsa tribe, and a long list of dignitaries—momentarily gathering lesser fry into the number—had entered the affair. I was offered the chance to be one of the *zuwa* (mediators) who would gather to talk over the affair. But I pled ignorance of Tibetan custom and eloquence, both being helpful, for

each zuwa is supposed to make at least one major speech in the course of the many conferences that take place. In a word, the affair was "tied," and "tied" most securely.

Something of the grimness and the strain of courage opposed to gathering dangers now lifted from Temchok's face. But with further reflection the sadness and shadows of remorse seemed to deepen.

"What will those now call me who once called me Handsome Fortune Temchok?" he questioned as the night filled the guest room and only a guttering candle flickered. "And what have I done to my merit score by piling murder on thirty years of saintly deeds? In deeds I have gone back to the deeds of lawless youth, but my flesh is the flesh of an old man and my years are the years of an old man. No thirty-five years of opportunity are before me. By the Sacred Books, I am an old man and very tired."

Full accounts of progress in the settlement reached me daily. For almost a month the argument went on. Today it was reported that Temchok, by flatly refusing to accede to some of the terms of agreement, had broken off all negotiations. Tomorrow it was the family of the slain man—for whom, by the way, no one seemed to have much use—that had balked. Yet in their hearts everyone firmly expected that settlement was sure.

The roster of arbitrators was, as I have said, enormously imposing. To withhold assent to their final settlement would have amounted to a direct affront to all the authority and power in the region. And though every Tibetan had the

recognized right of finally refusing to speak affirmatively—the one inalienable right of a freedom-loving people—no one expected either party to decline to do so in this case. And of course everyone was sure that, once the final terms were ratified, they would be scrupulously observed. Handsome Fortune Temchok had shot his own son-in-law but he still had his reputation for honor. The other side would not dare break the agreement with such powerful arbitrators involved. So went the rumors—part of the mysterious news bulletins that circulate in an almost psychic manner—throughout Tibetan country. At last the day came when it was all settled. It was announced that the principals "had spoken." We all felt much relieved.

Some days later Temchok again sat in my guest room. He was going the rounds of his friends, he told me, and I needed no further hint. I selected a ten-ounce lump of particularly white silver and donated it as my contribution to the atonement—the life money—he must pay. From his estimate of the total I realized that Temchok would never again be a very wealthy man. He was already selling much of what he possessed. As he laid aside his rifle he sadly pointed out that it was only a second-grade Japanese carbine. It seemed that the one item for which there could be no substitution was the rifle in the affair. The weapon that had been the instrument of the killing must be included in the atonement, and so Temchok no longer carried the Waffenbrik Mauser.

His former tenseness had left him, but instead had come a

settled gloom that overshadowed all he said and did. "No, Sherab, there is nothing now I can do but start the old way. Your way might be right, and my way has certainly brought me no good, yet it is the only way I know. I will start all over again with my prayers, my rosary, and saintly deeds, but most of all with the treading of the path of Gora, for the little lamasery is very near my home."

To the *must* of inner compulsion he could now add no *can*, for the bulwarks of habit and years of restraint and sacrifice had been shattered. The character that manned the inner citadel had been broken by the test. Yet near his village home, along the path outlined on the shoulder of the hill—the path that leads around the lamasery in the sacred circle of meritorious performance—along that path his aged feet would begin again to tread the way they had started thirty-five years before.

He waved goodbye, invited me to come visit him and sit at his fireside once more; even wondering jocularly if I only came to see him when my horse was injured and I had soaked my boots in the icy stream. Apparently no longer afraid, he rode away. As he disappeared around a bend in the trail I remembered that I had been on the point of asking him if he had no fears of vengeance. But, I reasoned, his assurance seemed the sure answer. Then too, hadn't the affair been settled in Tibetan manner by the best and most powerful arbitrators of the entire region? One day I would go and sit by the fire, or in the sun, and talk with him. And I felt sure that there would be the ghost of a twitching on

his lips once more as he fingered his beads and muttered an endless litany.

Weeks later I was riding into Lhamo when a horseman galloping purposefully to head me on the trail gave me concern until I realized it was Stretch Ears. I waited until he caught up.

"Have you heard the news?" he called. "Handsome Fortune Temchok has been killed—his brains blown out by a shot from ambush as he came down from the lamasery where he had been following the path of Gora."

Somewhere on that narrow path cut into the hill between the shoulder of the lamasery and his village home, Temchok Tsering, once called Handsome Fortune Temchok, had met his death.

XVI

Tamdro's Revenge

Our friend, old Temchok Tsering, was dead—shot through the head as he walked the path of Gora. Shot from ambush by the brother of the man whom he had killed. Shot in spite of the fact that the affair had been settled according to Tibetan custom, and with the payment of life money. Shot because the lust for vengeance had broken down the restraint of custom, agreement and the unwritten law of the land and invaded even the hallowed Gora path which should have been inviolate.

As our horses swung side by side into an easy rhythmic gait down the trail toward Lhamo, Stretch Ears shifted sideways in the saddle the better to talk and tell me the full tale.

"Pitiful, pitiful that Handsome Fortune Temchok should come to such an end!" he groaned. "He was so just an old man. Yet, of course, when a man shoots his own son-in-law sin and misery must follow. But he had paid all the atonement. He had made himself a poor man to make up the

total of the biggest life money ever paid in Jangtsa for a man who wasn't a chief. If they wished to fight and kill why did they ever make assent when the agreement was made by the zuwa? And why, black-hearted yellow-eyed filth, did they ever take the money? My heart has no peace to think of Temchok Tsering lying on the Gora path with his brains scattered in the dust. The two lamaseries, the eighteen clans of the Tebus and the headmen of Jangtsa couldn't make safety for him—you were wise Sherab, not to be a zuwa—and now he has gone to the 'life hereafter.'"

Stretch Ears' bleak, hard face that never showed anything seemed vaguely softened and shadowed, though his eyes continued to flick restlessly over the landscape, taking in trail and sky line with inbred caution.

"Now what will happen?" I questioned. "And what about the body?" The thought of Temchok's stately figure sprawled in the dust, his sculptured face twisted and broken, was intolerable.

"Oh, the corpse, that will be all right," said Stretch Ears. "Below the place where the Jangtsa mountain god looks down from the peak of Old Man Lagu is a spot the vultures know. Tamdro has no doubt already taken the corpse there and separated the parts so that the vultures will not be too long. It will be well disposed of. But what will now happen no one knows. We shall see what kind of a son Tamdro is. They said there was the sound of shooting down near the village but no one has heard what happened."

I shivered as if a new and colder wind had blown right through my sheepskin coat—a wind that came straight from

that bare mountainside where perhaps at that very moment Tamdro and a companion or two with a swift rush of praying, were hacking dutifully, their sharp knives making all ready for the vultures that would drop from above, the sound of their wings like wind screaming through telegraph wires. Would they leave a bone or two, or maybe the skull—a spot of dingy white in next year's new growth of grass—to tell of the end of Temchok Tsering, once called Handsome Fortune Temchok? Tibet was a wild land. My gaze followed Stretch Ears' with just a touch of added watchfulness, as it dwelt upon the line between the grassy wind-swept steppe and the changing uncertain Tibetan sky.

Jamtzen's voice was almost meditative as he went on: "Handsome Fortune Temchok was our friend, yours and mine, and Tamdro, the son, is now also our friend. But we shall see whether he is one like his father or not . . . Ah, the good old man!"

The darkness of the compound courtyard was filled with sound and fury; seven or eight dogs raged and poured their alarm against the big compound gate where they heard a cautious, calculated knocking. Weapons in our hands, and slashing right and left at the dogs, my men and I managed to reach the gate. Through the howling and snarling there came other sounds: the stamping of hooves, the clink of snaffle bits, the ring of stirrups and the faint whispering of guttural voices that called softly but urgently for admittance.

Through the closed gate and with some uncertainty, be-

cause of the uproar, one of the riders was finally identified as Tamdro. The bars were taken down, and out of the absolute blackness of a starless night into the light of candles and one flashlight, rode the son of Temchok and four companions. The last man in immediately turned to bar the gate.

Leaving their horses' heads checked up, and without even loosening saddle girths, the men crowded into the guest room where a fire was being hastily made and the gatekeeper was setting out the beginnings of a meal. The long, heavy, hiltless broadswords and the rifles with their forked rests filled the room. I persuaded the men to stack them in a corner in spite of a reluctance to leave their weapons at more than arm's length. They seemed relieved when Tamdro said in a short, final tone, that it was all right, and eagerly sat down to eat and drink.

As I directed the serving of the meal, the words I felt I should say would not come, and my guests, being frankly hungry, ate and drank with satisfaction, saying nothing. However, Tamdro murmured half apologetically as he began his second mixing of tsamba. I realized they were half starved and pressed them to eat and drink to the full. Remembering the horses, I suggested that when they had rested a bit they also be fed.

But again Tamdro spoke authoritatively and briefly for all. "No, they must go hungry for they will travel better when empty and we have far to go. We cannot rest, for you know how we now are wolves on the bare hillside. Only be-

cause you were Abba Temchok's friend, and our friend too, do we even dare knock at your gate when the night is blackness of blackness. Before the day breaks we must go on and you must even forget we were here. We are just a dream at midnight that you must not even speak about."

At last the words I felt I should say began to come! "Pitiful, pitiful—my heart has been full of pain and unrest since we heard about Abba. The good old man! And now what has been done in the affair, and what is the custom? Now that the agreement is broken what do the zuwa, who made the first settlement, do?"

Tamdro answered with a hard hate in his voice that seemed to link the circle of saddle-weary men in a fixed changeless purpose, just as the closing of a contact charges all the parts of an electric circuit; and the intensity of that charge sent shivers down my back. "There is no custom for this affair," he said. "It is no affair, for an affair can be talked—may be settled—but this one only ends when the men who ride with the murderer are killed. I shot his brother and Ate here shot his uncle, but we didn't get him. He fled and the others were in the hills so we picked up the corpse—my father—and took it to the vultures on the hillside of Amni Lagu. No, the black-hearted devil who fired the shot we didn't get," said Tamdro bitterly. "Now we hear that eight men ride with him. Ayah, there is no custom to settle this affair! Those nine men must die and after nine men have died, the Enlightened One himself couldn't tie this affair or make an agreement.

"But the zuwa—the men who settled the affair the last time—the two lamaseries, the eighteen clans of the Tebus, the headmen of Jangtsa"—his voice was harshly ironic as he named the long list—"they should help kill the nine, yet all they do is say good words, and send me information of where the trail of the nine men is marked. That is why we ride in the night. There are more of us but the others don't have rifles yet, so only five of us ride. The zuwa won't even lend us rifles."

I inwardly thanked my lucky stars that I had refused to be involved in the earlier settlement, and then asked about Tamdro's mother.

"She still stays at home," he told me. "Yes, there is much fearfulness. They may even kill her, but the fields are sown so she stays until the harvest and, if they come to the house, she will act as if she were crazy. Poor mother is almost crazy anyway for Abba was very good to her. She weeps all day, for her flesh yearns for him."

Even as he spoke Tamdro was tightening his girdle and adjusting his cartridge belt and the others were rising to leave the guest room. By the light of flares and the flashlight they tightened saddle girths, and disappeared through the shadowed gateway into the void of darkness beyond. The bars were set behind them and the dogs raged until foam choked their barking.

If Stretch Ears had been there I knew he would have been utterly satisfied with the man Handsome Fortune Temchok's son had turned out to be. I remembered the grave,

industrious, thoughtful young Tibetan—restrained and quiet —who had smiled at me as we sat beside the hearth fire in his home. The grim, fierce-eyed desperado who had just been beside the guest room fire with his band of cutthroats bore only a faint resemblance to the young friend of that earlier time.

We were all, of course, friends, but now even as friends there had been a quality in their red-eyed stare that made one wonder if there was anything they would stop at to get rifles in sufficient number to accomplish their self-decreed mission in life. Their homes had been deserted. Their wives and children wandered as beggars in Tebu land, and they rode midnight trails, seeking their enemies who numbered nine to their five. And in a memory-haunted house an old woman was going crazy with grief.

During that summer we traveled far and wide among the tents, and once, on the invitation of my host, joined a hunting party in quest of a stag, for the antlers were in the velvet and worth as much as two hundred ounces of silver a set. We found no stag but as we sat around the noon fire one of the huntsmen told his fellows the biggest hunting story of the season.

"Brave Son Tamdro," he said—and by his nickname I knew that the son of my friend had won his place in the popular regard—"Brave Son Tamdro and his companions killed five stag in one day in far-off Tagra. After having lived in the woods for a month, hunting and checking signs, they

followed the band for four days and four nights until they came up on them as they rested in a thicket at noon, and shot all five—all big ones." A mutter of envy and admiration ran around the fire to flavor our noontime tea.

One of the men added: "That means five more good rifles. Now we shall hear of game bigger than stag."

Still later in the season we rode on our way home to Lhamo; the yak caravan moved over the soggy steppe and marshy foothills through one of the most miserably uncomfortable of all Tibetan days. The cold, partly sleety downpour soaked everything, and the distant hills were curtained by the driving rain.

An old monk from Samtsa rode with us for protection, complaining at the slowness of the yak and wishing he could go on at a faster gait. At the same time he was afraid to leave us and ride alone. It seemed too miserable a day for robbers to be abroad, but even so we traveled with precaution. We were not surprised, therefore, to sight a band of horsemen behind us crossing the plain toward the foothills. I hated to dismount and let my saddle get wet, but I propped myself on my elbows in the grass. Through my binoculars I could make out a party of five riders. Five riders in themselves did not constitute a menace to the caravan, and I was further relieved to note that one of them was a monk. Monks hardly ever ride on robbing forays, and if they do they at least leave off their priestly robes. Realizing that they were riding fast and would quickly overtake us, I got back into my soaking saddle and caught up with the irregular line of straggling yak.

Minutes lengthened and still no one came riding past. After we had crossed the third rise the old monk stopped talking and became vaguely fearful. I dropped back while the caravan went on slowly over the next rise. As it disappeared, five riders topped the hill behind, saw me and stopped, bunching together, silently waiting. I rode on and at the next rise the same thing occurred: five armed figures—I could see their rifles—stood with vague menace on the sky line. Were they acting in concert with another larger party and stalking us? The next fold of the irregular meadow we were crossing led to a high shoulder of the foothills. We were about to turn toward that higher ground when the band of riders suddenly appeared on the hillside above, circling us in a wide arc and moving at a steady trot. As they passed, their heads went down and hats and collars were pulled into position to mask their faces. Even so, and in spite of their hats, we could see that the monk and one other carried two rifles apiece.

Our Samtsa friend, noting priestly garments in the party, saw a chance to ride with companions who moved faster than the slow, grunting, jostling yak. and, waving goodbye to us, he started on to overtake the other party. The faster he rode the more energetically they whipped their horses, although, when they once suddenly stopped, he seemed about to catch up to them. After a while he sagged dispiritedly in his saddle and waited for us, leaving the party of five horsemen to follow the trail up the long hill ahead of us.

Something was wrong and we still had ten miles of dangerous robber-infested country ahead of us before we could

get to Lhamo. Especially disconcerting was the report the old priest brought back.

"I'm sure they spoke like Jangtsa men," he insisted, "and once one said, 'That is the caravan of the foreigner Sherab Dzondri.'"

I had no trouble with anyone in Jangtsa. Were those five men, two of whom carried two rifles apiece, going ahead to make trouble for us? These thoughts persisted as we rode mile after mile through the driving rain, and because of them we took to byways, carrying out the most fantastic precautions. All the while I wondered why Jangtsa men took note of my caravan and also took such elaborate pains to pass without being recognized. In my wondering a faint suspicion began to stir, and as the sight of Lhamo did away with all our fears it also gave me an opportunity to certify that suspicion. I rode straight to Stretch Ears' house and walked in with the announcement that I had come to drink his tea.

A sly, amused twinkle showed in his eyes as he poured the tea. "Any difficulty?" he asked, using the stock Tibetan question.

We had been soaked for hours. The loads had come off in mud and bog again and again and from the labors and mishaps of the day I must have looked utterly bedraggled and miserable. But there is a Tibetan fiction I have never had the hardihood to break. If you are still on your feet and able to speak there is only one answer to the stock question, "Any difficulty?" and I gave it as I blew back the melted

butter from the tea in my bowl: "Not at all," I denied airily. To admit difficulty was unthinkable, but still Stretch Ears quizzed.

"Not even when five men passed you and two of the five carried two rifles apiece?" I could only stare. Then he laughed.

"Didn't you know who they were? Couldn't you think?"

The suspicion that had been slowly turning over in my subconscious now suddenly became a certainty. "You mean the men who killed old Handsome Fortune Temchok," I stated rather than questioned.

"No, they are dead," he answered. "But these are the members of the clan and the monk is the brother. They brought the rifles to Lhamo to pay for the saying of prayers for the men who have died. Many men have died in the last two days, Sherab Dzondri." And then he told the tale.

Three days before, a party headed by the man who had shot Temchok had raided the home where the old woman lived alone. They had pretty well wrecked the place and though the old woman had seemed a mumbling idiot they had knocked her into a corner, seemingly more dead than alive. As they smashed and destroyed—not daring to fire the house because of the danger to the rest of the village—they must have dropped more than a hint of their plans, for after they left a grim, sorely bruised, but only slightly wounded old woman came to life. Commandeering a neighbor's horse, she rode to the first of the relays of scouts and messengers Tamdro had posted. Before daybreak ten well-

armed men—the five stags *had* meant five more rifles—were closing in on a certain camp not so far from where the Jangtsa mountain god looks down from the peak of Old Man Lagu.

Just as dawn revealed the camp of a party of men stirring to start the morning fire, Tamdro and his companions opened fire. Only two escaped, but one of the other seven lived until fellow clansmen came to the rescue. Either fearing attack or appalled at the completeness of his success, Tamdro never even looted the camp but simply blasted every living thing, men and horses, with gunfire and then rode off, leaving the proofs of his victory and vengeance to twitch and groan just below the hillside where he had once given his father's corpse to the vultures. So it was that the rifles of the dead could be used to pay for the prayers that the monks would say, and the clansmen and brother of the dead had ridden through the rain carrying two rifles apiece.

"Will the affair ever be tied or settled?" I questioned, but Stretch Ears shook his head and answered:

"This is an affair that can never be tied and never be settled, even by the Enlightened One himself. What sin and death came from Temchok Tsering's mistake! And now death must come closer and closer. Tamdro must always fear death—he and the men who ride with him. But what a man he is! Nine men killed for his father's death! Yes, maybe that is a little too much and too fierce a settling, but he has proven to be a good son to his father Handsome Fortune Temchok. We should be proud to have him for a friend."

Stretch Ears might be proud, but I wondered whether I would be comfortable if I ever again met Tamdro or if he and his men came to call in the dark of the moon when the stars are hidden, for he was indeed a part of a blood feud that would never be tied or settled.

XVII

Tibetan Pilgrim's Progress

The waters of northeast Tibet, rising in a thousand springs and rivulets, flow eastward into the basins of the Yellow and Yangtze rivers and so to the waiting sea. But the pilgrim tide of the land, welling from a thousand villages and encampments, flows strongly upward, southward and westward across the high passes and bleak plateaus of Bod—high Bod—until it finds its rest and fulfillment in the holy city of Lhasa, the place of gods, where the rock and walls of the Potala mark the end of the pilgrim trail.

The pilgrimage to Lhasa, place of gods, prostrations and offerings, is the supreme fact and event in the life of the people of northeast Tibet. It crowns religious aspiration and endeavor with one final effort; a tangible benediction and fulfillment as the pilgrim, at the end of the three-month journey, first sights the golden roofs of the Potala, finds his way with prayers and prostrations to every holy place and makes the offering of a lifetime at the shrine of Jowo, the holiest of all.

It is also the trade opportunity of a lifetime. In Lhasa, British broadcloth, Indian cottons, Lhasa pulu, coral, amber and the highly prized, beautifully marked leopard skins of the Indian jungle are to be bought at what seem like bargain prices to the nomads of the north. Transportation over the trail either going or returning costs nothing, since the yak of the caravan live off the country. Food stocks are taken to last the round trip, and half of the baggage animals can carry goods on the way back. No pilgrim is so poor that he does not set aside a sum for trade even though it may lessen the total of his offerings. Indeed, Lhasa, with its shrines and shops, offers a unique battleground for the conflict of the two outstanding interests of Tibetan life: trade and religion.

And where neither religion nor trade furnishes the ultimate motive, the pilgrimage is yet the final adventure of life. Young monks bored with lamasery routine, or rebellious against the discipline of some stern higher monk, wipe out all scores by starting for Lhasa, with small packs on their backs and the comforting assurance, as they beg their way, that no Tibetan will let a pilgrim starve. Even girls in their teens or early twenties may run away from home and work, secure in the knowledge that when they come back a year later, with all the thrills of a lifetime packed into twelve months, they will not only be received but will have achieved the status of heroines in the home community.

There are a score or more trysting places in northeast Tibet where community and tribal pilgrim bands meet and

coalesce until all merge into the great pilgrim caravan that once a year follows the Lhasa trail. One of the most important of these rendezvous is at the crossing of the Yellow River some distance below its upper knee at Soghtsong. Here it is that the caravan finally becomes organized under the leadership of whatever noteworthy lama or chief is making the pilgrimage that year. Here it is that the friends and relatives who have escorted the pilgrims thus far say the last farewells and, having seen them safely over the river, turn homeward, and the caravan, now a homogeneous unit, goes on.

During the years I spent among the tent dwellers of Amdo—the northeastern district of Tibet—opportunity and incentive seemed a number of times about to set me, too, on the pilgrim trail, at least as far as the crossing of the river. Year after year I had said goodbye to many friends that I well might have escorted to that rendezvous. Something always happened to intervene. And so such a trip was farthest from my thoughts until Gomchok, one of my Samtsa friends, between sips of an interminable tea drinking, made the suggestion that we go together to give a proper send-off to many mutual friends.

Gomchok was a monk who broke his monkish vows in a love affair with the Ngawa queen and, though still wearing priestly robes, had been a man of the world for over twenty years. He had been the steward of the Gurdu lamasery, prime minister for the king of Ngawa, then on his own as a trader, and now was the acknowledged leader of a dozen

families who had rebelled from the control of the Gurdu lamasery. Though they moved with the Samtsa tribe, these families seemed on their way to becoming the nucleus of a new tribe under Gomchok's leadership.

Now, his dark face suddenly alive with a bright new thought and plan, he gave me reasons for what at first had been a casual suggestion. "I have to escort the Tala lama to the crossing and see him safely over, so I must go," he said. "But you come too. We'll take five or six of the best rifles in the encampment and have a good time. You are the foreigner. You have your collapsible boat, and we'll show all the pilgrims who gather from ten tribes or more how to cross the Yellow River without their old ferry. And then, coming back, we'll come through that rough country at the source of the Tao River where there are wild sheep, deer and maybe even wapiti. And everywhere the meadows are thick with flowers."

My face must have shown something of the various objections rising in my mind, for he went on more insistently: "Think of all the friends we'll meet! The Tawng Lowng chief is heading the caravan this year and you should send him off. He is a friend. Yes, I know he has never cared much for the foreigner. He is afraid of your religion. But take your boat and show him your worth. Then, too, you can take pictures. We'll go, what?"

He had utterly persuaded himself, but half intoxicated with the flow of his own eloquence—he knew he was a famous orator—went on to climax his argument and, inci-

dentally, win my agreement. "And think of all the people you can preach to. Not just a few, as in this encampment, but hundreds. We'll put the lama's tent beside our tent. He will chant and beat his drum, you will sing and preach. The pilgrims will come and listen to you, and you can tell them they need not go on pilgrimage, but just to believe your religion. The lama will chant and go on pilgrimage, but he will have to trust to your boat to get across the river although he doesn't trust your faith."

The keen sense of the incongruous, together with the odd mixture of reverence and a cynical tendency to make up for that reverence by indulging in the most irreverent jibes and jokes, is common to most Tibetans. It now got the better of even Gomchok's oratory and he laughed till the tears came at the pictures his own words called up.

He progressed to the final point: "Maybe, though, your boat is no good and you couldn't cross the river. In which case I have been boasting of you without good reason. Yes, if that is the case, perhaps you had better stay at home. That would be best if you are afraid of the river or afraid to preach your religion to pilgrims when the lama can argue you down. . . ."

That dare was the last word in Tibetan argument, and Gomchok's eyes, serious, friendly, skeptical and somewhat reckless, searched my face for an answer.

So it was that I came to spend seven days on the pilgrim trail.

We were to start at dawn. But Tibetan travel, even that of a holy lama on pilgrimage, seldom keeps to schedule. The slipping of the hobble anklet on one of the lama's mounts meant that a horse, naturally wild, defied every attempt to catch him and finally vanished in the distance. The riders of the encampment straggled back later to report their failure. Gomchok, in sheer chagrin—for had he not slyly hinted that I should have to get up early to travel with his lama and himself?—alternately prayed savagely and cursed with remarkable inclusiveness and invention as he directed operations.

He finally ordered a start and we moved off into the heat waves that dance across the steppe at noon of a cloudless day. He and two others, he explained, would stay over and see whether they could track and catch the horse, for they could easily catch up to the slow-moving yak caravan on the second day.

As we headed toward the nearest range of mountains, whistling to the oxen and retying loads as a matter of course (there are always some loads that have to be reroped), there was opportunity to take a mental roll call of the party. The "kettle" of pilgrims numbered only four: the lama, two young priests who would act as his servants, and a little acolyte of twelve years, quite pop-eyed with the thrill of really starting for Lhasa. The little acolyte carefully kept as far away from me as the exigencies of the trail would permit. He caught his breath with a half-choking gasp whenever my horse came near his, for he had been solemnly

assured by the wags of the party that I would cut off his ears at the first favorable opportunity.

The lama was smiling and friendly but rather handicapped when it came to making conversation: he had taken a vow that imposed silence all the hours that he traveled toward Lhasa. This meant that in camp he could talk, but on the trail he could only make signs and try to talk without opening his lips. Remembering Ama Doko, I knew he would get on quite well, keeping his vow and cheating too.

Of our own kettle, three of the five rifles Gomchok had promised rode with us; they were men to whom the routine of travel was a picnic. Because Gomchok was not due to join us until the next day, the acting leader was seventy-year-old Akku Jamtso, who had come for the pure fun of the trip. He had the face of a Buddhist saint, the mind and utterance of a casuist, but the irrepressible soul of a born wit and comedian. Much of that, however, was in abeyance on that first day as he solemnly gave advice to the lama's men.

My Chinese servant and myself completed the roll of kettle mates.

We sighted riders across the plain but it was assumed that they were the herders of the Tawng Lowng chief's party which we were to meet the next day at the Medicine Spring. We also saw gazelle but, though we were meatless, the etiquette of escorting pilgrims forbade hunting. Early in the afternoon we turned into the mountains, leaving the plain and sunshine for a narrow valley and low-hanging clouds that soon brought rain. The Tibetans, however, serenely ig-

nored it, disdaining even to untie their felt raincoats. Camp was made in that same downpour but, once the tents were up and all the loads stacked, the rain stopped. The night was thick and black, however, when we scattered to sleeping places on the edge of camp and we exhorted one and all to call each other whenever waking. The lama chanted, beating his drums and blowing his horn far into the night, while we hallooed to one another around the rim of camp to keep hypothetical or real—which, one never actually knew—thieves away. So ended the first day on the pilgrim trail.

We broke camp next morning and moved up the valley under the constant threat of rain that never came, though the heavy clouds pressed close to the pass and the mountainsides were dark patterns of dull green studded with sullen gray where scree and outcroppings of rock broke through. But by the time we reached the Medicine Springs the sky was cloudlessly blue from one far horizon to the other. The Yellow River was not far away and the open valley of its course, marked by benches or terraces of different levels, showed where our route lay.

It was still early in the forenoon and there was much argument as to whether we should make camp or wait and see whether the Tawng Lowng chief's caravan would stop or go on. The arrival of his advance guard settled all doubts, and we made camp, finishing in plenty of time to help our friends in the big caravan get settled.

The pilgrim party consisted of twenty-seven kettles with an aggregate of nearly five hundred yak. That made one big

circle of tents. In addition to that, there were three hundred horsemen of the chief's tribe who had come as escort to the crossing of the Yellow River. Cattle and horses scattered to graze, and throughout a clear afternoon friends and acquaintances wandered from tent to tent, and from camp fire to camp fire, retailing news, gossip and endless conjecture about the sum of things under the sun.

One item of news was that the runaway horse had been caught the day before by the chief's herders and the lama need no longer worry. "Yes, on days like this the pilgrim trail to Lhasa is one long picnic," pronounced old Akku Jamtso as we drank bowl after bowl of tea and watched it all from the door of our tent. "But then, think when it rains for ten days without a let-up on the upper plateau and there is no more dry fuel anywhere. Then there is bitterness that is real and hard to swallow."

Much of the time was taken up in candid discussion of the size of the presents we were each giving to our friends the pilgrims, from the Tawng Lowng chief on down. Of course prestige and "face" are considerations, but in truth there is little of pure helpfulness involved, for the pilgrim recipient is duty bound to bring back a gift from Lhasa that is at least the full value of what he receives. Indeed, somewhat more than equal measure is expected; for after all there is the interest that would accrue in twelve months' time. So we discussed our prospective investments, making visit after visit to the firesides of our pilgrim friends. By general agreement we deferred our visit to the tent of the

chief until Gomchok should come to introduce his protégé, the lama, to the Tawng Lowng chief and make suitable oration for us all.

A visit to the Medicine Spring showed it to rise in an outcropping of yellowish sandstone that looked rather odd in a perfectly flat and marshlike plain. To the pilgrims gathered around, it was peculiarly holy, having been called into existence two hundred years ago by a famous lama. To me the brown, bubbling waters were fizzy and tasted strongly and unmistakably of iron, combined with something else I could not identify.

To my kettle mates my known skepticism about all things holy was such a matter of course that they were greatly surprised that I drank any of the water. And when I ventured the opinion that the waters were undoubtedly beneficial to one's internal economy, that pronouncement started a regular stampede to the spring, where they all drank largely and then came back to sit around the fire and compare notes on how it affected them. They obviously expected immediate and astonishingly beneficial results. From what happened later I rather think the mineral I could not identify was similar to Epsom salts.

Near sunset Gomchok arrived with a long tale of hours of fruitless search and the equally baffling results of consultation with various oracles in regard to the horse's whereabouts. None had agreed and, consigning one after another to perdition, they had yet consulted all they could reach. Now, with the knowledge that the chief's herders had found and caught the horse, came also the remembrance that one

oracle had said something about the west—though all knew that the horse had visibly vanished into the west—and much credit was given to that particular oracle, although Gomchok continued to pour maledictions on the others as he told his tale.

The visit to the chief's tent and presentation of gifts was brief and offhand as many Tibetan transactions are. We filed into the tent, the lama ahead, for Gomchok must introduce him to the chief and commend him to his care. The rest of us counted out our gifts in Chinese silver dollars, while Gomchok droned breathlessly through his speech and the chief's secretary wrote down the amount of each gift and the name of the donor.

"Mustn't get them mixed, or someone would feel bad," grunted the chief. Then, refusing tea, we all left as abruptly as we had come, stalking off without a backward look although the old chief did get near enough to slap me on the back and urge me to frequent his fireside for the next few days.

Back at our own fireside the three-cornered battle of wits and words between Gomchok, Akku Jamtso and myself, which was to rage with but short intermissions for the next five days, began and helped to season the evening meal.

Darkness closed in after a time, and the shouting of the pilgrims as they made evening offerings came faintly on the wind. Nearby the lama began his nightly chant and it seemed to remind Gomchok of a sort of promise he had made.

"Come," he said, "we'll have a service too. Sherab Dzondri,

begin your gospel stories and sing and pray while we listen."

Who could tell what he thought as, with an enigmatic expression, he faced the flickering fire and listened. But his hands were spread wide in the politest of gestures when I finished and he thanked me in courtly phrases.

Then his mood changed.

"Look at me," he said jocularly. "The Tawng Lowng chief hasn't a single priest in his camp of twenty-seven or more tents, but in my little camp of two tents I have a Tibetan lama of high repute and a foreign lama of even higher standing. How blest are we all."

The stars seemed hung close enough to touch as we scattered to our sleeping places, located on the edges of the camp surrounding the cattle and horses, so we forbore to urge each other to call and shout. Nearly four hundred Tibetans were already hallooing to one another and taunting suppositious thieves in the darkness. We might as well enjoy a carefree sleep at the end of our second day on the Lhasa trail.

On the third day our progress was much like a parade or tour of inspection. However Canterbury pilgrims may have dressed as they told their tales, Lhasa pilgrims put on their gayest and best. Especially colorful was the party of the chief, for his two wives carried thousands of dollars worth of brocade, otter fur, amber and silver on their persons. His daughter with her two children—a boy of about twelve and a little girl of seven just able to sit her horse—were also along; the daughter dressed the most richly of all and flirting

outrageously. Gradually all the riders who could be spared from driving the cattle forged to the front and, like a troop of cavalry, we came down on a deserted winter campsite with the Yellow River only a mile or two away.

We had scarcely finished making camp before Gomchok and his two companions arrived with a mutton, and much of the afternoon was spent in making various kinds of sausage and eating such delicacies as tripe, liver, lights, eyes and sinews as fast as they could be cooked. But even such activity was halted when clouds of dust warned us of riders and herds in motion and word was passed around that a large band of refugees was coming up the trail.

It was the old Tibetan story of a tribe getting into trouble because of lawlessness. This time it had been the murder of forty soldiers and officers of the Chinghai provincial government. After months of warfare most of the tribe had surrendered, but these were the irreconcilables; seventy or eighty families were now moving with all their belongings and livestock into strange country and hoped to find refuge and pasture somewhere.

With the record of wounds and alarms endured plain to be seen, they were desperate and truculent. Monks with only scraps of their monkish robes left now carried rifles and swords; old men balanced long lances; boys carried matchlocks two sizes too big for them; and women, swearing hoarsely at the herds, bore the brunt of keeping the cattle moving and the loads straight, while the menfolk scouted far ahead or behind. Some of the old and sick in-

quired feebly if good campsites were near, but most asked their way with more than a chip on both shoulders. Recklessness had made them past caring. One woman, her hair tightly bound without ornament, dust-covered and hoarse of voice, argued with me some minutes about the trail until suddenly, on her preoccupied consciousness, dawned the fact of my light hair and blue eyes, for all my Tibetan cloak. As I quickly brought a camera to focus, she cried out, "Say prayers to all the holy Buddhas, but what blue-eyed, yellow-haired devil is this on the way!" and rode off in confusion as roars of laughter followed her up the trail.

We made the fourth day's short stage to the crossing under low hanging clouds and misty curtains of rain, and set up camp within a hundred yards of the river—here jade green and about three hundred yards wide. Almost at once the rain ceased and everyone drowsed in the bright sunshine. Gomchok and Akku Jamtso settled down to a quizzical inspection of camp and everybody's business through my binoculars. Nothing was sacred, not even the genuflections of one of the pilgrims who, having evidently set herself a daily stint of several hundred to perform, had chosen a slope that helped lessen the effort as she faced uphill. But, though she had compromised on location, every prostration was a complicated ritual, with added motions that Gomchok and Akku Jamtso had evidently never seen, since their comments were marvels of contradiction. They lauded her zeal, joked at her flourishes and went to all lengths as they speculated on the number and variety of sins that required such novel expiation.

But even with binoculars and gossip the time dragged, so I started for a swim, to be halted by a storm of protest from Gomchok. I was his guest, he was responsible for me, the river was not only swift and dangerous, but full of fearsome creatures, some flesh and some spiteful spirits. Swimming is, for the most part, an unknown art to the Tibetans, and for some time Gomchok's opposition was most resolute. Finally a compromise was reached and, grim of face, he and the other kettle mates followed me to the river to see that I kept my promise not to cross and not to go farther than a rope's length from the bank.

When we returned to camp Gomchok boasted endlessly to one and all about the human otter he had with him. He was convinced that I had air bladders, like a fish, in my insides.

So the fourth day passed—an idle day in camp, yet a pilgrim's day on the Lhasa trail.

The fifth day dawned hot and clear.

Again we drowsed in the heat, sleeping late and killing time over the morning meal. Some hitch had occurred about arranging for the ferry, and no one knew when the crossing would take place. Also, the report had leaked out that the two canvas bags piled in our tent contained a boat, and several of Gomchok's special friends appeared to see if they too, loads and all, might not get a lift across.

"What, take loads over?" Gomchok assumed a lofty, rather scornful manner for their benefit. "Oh, no. That is only a plaything. You know how the foreigner likes to play—yes, like an otter. Well, he has brought it to play in. The lama

and party going across? Oh, no. They'll cross in the regular ferry. We wouldn't dare risk anything valuable in a plaything like that."

So Gomchok went on, his usually saturnine face alight with the joy of invention. I stayed out of it but thought that if we did make a specially quick and successful crossing he would have some rather difficult explaining to do to some of his friends. But because of the deceptive smallness and seeming fragility of the King collapsible boat, we were bothered with no more requests when we assembled it. It seemed to all who saw it obviously no more than a plaything.

Again I went for a swim. The early afternoon sun was hot and I had promised to start teaching one or two of the bolder spirits something about swimming. I was still shaking the water from my ears after the first plunge when everyone started running toward camp at the sound of rifle fire downstream. In the midst of all the excitement, the Tawng Lowng chief arrived, coolly matter-of-fact—though his poise was a trifle overdone—and asked me if I would go with him to make contact with the firing troops and secure status and protection for the camp.

Gomchok felt sure he now held a winning hand. "It is all right," he assured the crowd, "our foreigner has only to see the commander and it will be quite all right."

I was not so sure, and of course the joker in his statement was that I might get shot before I ever got to see the commander—but at least I could speak Chinese, once we got near enough to call.

Our first glimpse of horsemen was when they were only about a quarter of a mile away. At the last minute the old chief balked. "You meet them and talk with them—then come back to me," he said.

It was too late to argue, so, waving a white handkerchief and hoping for the best, I rode forward. The nearer I got, the clearer it became that at least five rifles and a Mauser pistol were trained on me, and I began shouting my identity. Still the guns did not shift and I was almost there. As a final measure I pulled off my hat, crying, "Don't you recognize the yellow hair of a foreigner?" and a belated smile of courtesy replaced the blank amazement on the face of the officer holding the Mauser pistol.

Thus we made contact. Shortly after, the chief, his companions and I rode to see the CO, escorted by the Mauser-bearing officer and a troop of cavalry. We found Brigadier General Ma a polite, noncommittal person who assured us our camp was in no danger from his men and thanked us for coming to call. But he obviously regarded me as an inexplicable phenomenon until I had written down all the details of my identity, together with references for him to use in his nightly radio communication with the military headquarters of Chinghai Province.

There was little more to say. We simply sat and watched the battle. The expedition consisted of about five hundred magnificently mounted, hard-faced troopers who—as far as we could gather—had made a dash into Tibetan country to cut off the flight of the refugees we had seen the day before and about whom we carefully said nothing. The troops had

come out of the hills and down to the river at this point and, having been fired on by the Tibetans from the other side of the river, had returned the fire and launched an attack. As we watched, some two hundred soldiers swam the river on their horses under fire but covered by heavy rifle and machine-gun fire from the bluff on which we sat. They drove the Tibetans back into the hills and began to round up the herds of cattle and sheep on the flats as lawful booty.

Our arrival back in camp was a great triumph. Inside our tent I found a packed wall of faces and waiting ears. All afternoon Drashi Dondrub, the Tawng Lowng chief's right-hand man, a famous orator and diplomat, had said not a word, the still tongue in the wise head. But now he took his place in the center of camp. Those wishing for the best story instinctively made a great circle around him, but the crowd at our tent seemed nonetheless determined to stay. It was late and I was hungry, but first immemorial Tibetan custom must be obeyed. It is thus that legends start and epic poetry has its beginnings. I did my best, trying to tell all, but was through long before Drashi Dondrub, and many got to hear the latter half of his much better tale, after mine.

The morning of the sixth day was full of rain and the bluffs were lost in the mist, but the chief and I again rode to the camp of General Ma's Muslim troops. All night long, messengers from nearby tribes had been finding their way to the chief's tent. We were now riding for two reasons: the obvious one was to bring the present to General Ma which the old chief had promised the night before; the real

one, to ascertain whether the troops were turning back or going further on into Tibetan country. If it was the latter, the tribes were desirous of using our good offices to establish contact, present gifts and be listed as good citizens. No one, however, cared to waste presents if the troops were turning back.

We found the troops ready to start but waiting until all who had crossed had returned to the near bank. Evidently the poorer cattle and the sheep could not be induced to cross, and with tired horses, in the driving rain, the troopers were finding it a somewhat different matter from crossing in the heat of battle. But the Turki raftsmen among the troops had butchered some beeves and made skin rafts and were ferrying men and equipment while the horses swam.

The general assured us he was starting back immediately, word having come from headquarters to return since the expedition was a success. We congratulated him. Then the old chief made his speech and presented his gifts. The sight of the cattle and sheep on the far bank was a rather potent inspiration; for he included in his speech the rather unexpected proposal that, on his face and mine, the general give back those cattle and sheep.

The general blinked in amazement but gestured gracefully, "anything to oblige old friends—certainly." Of course he would have had to leave them anyway unless he had butchered them in sheer spite, so maybe it was a way out for him. We thanked him and left.

About three miles upstream we made contact with the Tibetans on the far bank and the old chief shouted his instructions.

"We persuaded the Chinese general to give back half the cattle and all the sheep, but you are not to go near them until after the troops have left."

A chorus of thanks and congratulation came back faintly over the wide river.

The chief turned in an aside to me. "Are you sure they are starting back?" he asked. I was reasonably sure. "And we have persuaded the general to turn back and do no more damage in Tibetan country," he continued. "The foreigner and I talked with him and persuaded him."

He winked broadly at the astonishment my face must have shown and remarked conversationally: "That was a big skin that I blew up, but to be a successful chief among the Tibetans one must blow up big ones whenever there is opportunity. And since you won't blow a big one for yourself I'll have to do it for you. I have come to trust and like you these past two days."

Even that was not the limit of his approbation; before we had reached the camp he had urged that I go with the caravan all the way to Lhasa. He would even wait a month on the far side of the stream while I got ready. "You see," he finished, "I always distrusted you about the religion part of it. I don't know yet how that will turn out but if, as our priests say, it is written in the holy books that some time in the future all of Tibet must turn to your religion, maybe

even now the time has about come and you are an advance guard. But you don't need to try to persuade me," he hastened to add, "I'm too old."

We exchanged courtesy calls throughout the afternoon and in fact were so very chummy that when the chief was sipping tea at our fireside and discussing the crossing of the river the next day I was more or less forced to make the gesture. "Of course," I said, "with our very little boat we really could not help much in the matter of getting your fifty or sixty loads across, but if you wish to send an advance guard over or have anything specially valuable you would like us to take we will be glad to do what we can."

He took one look at the "very little boat" and declined with utter finality. "No, no," he said politely, "I shouldn't think of troubling you. Not at all."

With darkness came the order shouted throughout the pilgrim camp that from each kettle at least one must come to the big offering and burning the chief was making. We were hardly pilgrims, but quite a discussion started at our kettle whether or not someone should go. Gomchok, however, settled the argument in his own way.

"The chief," he pronounced, "must have the foreigner save him from Chinese troops, and the lama must cross in the foreigner's boat—if it really is any good. We'll wait and see about that. So tonight, until the troops are really gone and the river has been crossed, we'll all be Christians. Sherab, get out your books and sing and pray."

The flame of a great burning lit the camp with a strange

red glare, and the shouting of the pilgrims tramping around the blaze showed in its intensity the extent of their worries about the crossing that must be ventured. But we stayed in the tent to hear about a boat on the sea of Galilee. It was the end of the sixth day.

Nine o'clock of the seventh day arrived, but with it no sign of the ferry being drawn to the near side nor of the chief getting started. Gomchok could keep still no longer, and, though it was rather bad form to start crossing before the chief, we took our little boat to the stream. There it looked smaller than ever and Gomchok's doubts redoubled. "No," he said, with genuine alarm, "the lama shall not cross in that. Let him go in the big ferry. And you, Sherab, leave off your cloak, so you can swim easily if anything happens."

The river had changed from jade green to olive and snatched angrily at the oars as I made the first trip, with a grim and serious-faced Tibetan in the stern and another in the bow. They were to do the unloading on the far side. The current was swift, but there were eddies that helped and with a little practice it became merely a matter of routine work to put load after load across.

After the fifth trip I found the lama waiting. The little boy was put in the bow, the lama got at the stern and off we started. With the first rush of water along the side as the current fought with the oars, the lama's lips opened with a rush of praying. But halfway over his face broke into smiles again and he asked me if we were midway. I nodded and he dipped into the current and drank from his hand, for

water from the center of the Yellow River—Peacock Waters, in Tibetan—is supposed to be medicinal in its powers. Then we caught up with and passed the great bargelike horse-drawn ferry in which the first boatload of pilgrims were crossing. We were greeted with wild hallooing by the braver ones, althought most of them merely clung to the sides with tight lips, pop-eyed with fright. And indeed the ferry did tip dangerously.

As I brought our little boat to the bank with a special flourish of the oars, the lama grinned and spread his palms. "I'd rather ride in your boat than in that," he exclaimed. "Thank you—a thousand thanks."

On the next trip I found two tents and two men awaiting me. They were the chief's men. Wishing that he had kept to his refusal, I was yet forced to keep to my offer, while Gomchok grinned impishly. The sun was high and hot, the river had risen two feet in two hours and had begun to show its tawny strength. And, unmistakably, blisters were beginning to rise on my palms. The loading and unloading at each bank was a riot of helpfulness, but there was no one else to take the oars and I was heartily glad when the last load of the lama's things was across. I rowed back with fancy strokes, for it was the last trip and I raced the horses of the ferry—only to find a new pile at the loading place. The old chief was waiting.

"Just four boatloads, Sherab," he begged, "be a sport and take them across as you promised. They are my money and best things that I'd rather trust to your boat."

I caught a glimpse of Gomchok's face as he ducked behind the pile and knew he was laughing at me. So indeed I had offered, but the old chief had refused. A voice near the boat, belonging to one of the men who had been most helpful in the loading, urged smoothly: "Take this one load across and then rest and drink. The chief's wife is waiting with buttermilk just for you."

After all, it was on the road to Lhasa and the time of pilgrimages. Trying to go easy on the blisters, I pulled for the far shore where, sure enough, the chief's wife was waiting with buttermilk and other refreshments.

By the time the last load was over, the river was freshly yellow with a truly angry crest. We took the boat quickly to camp to let it dry. While the others packed, I roamed the shore, watching the pilgrims crossing and always at my heels was the chief's little granddaughter, a serious-eyed little figure, chatting most companionably, much to the amusement of Gomchok and my kettle mates, who insisted that I had won at least one convert from the Lhasa trail.

We broke camp late that afternoon and rode into the mountains, our rifles at the ready, toward the haunts of blue sheep, deer and maybe even wapiti, until long after nightfall, when we made a dark camp in a hidden hollow.

It was the end of the seventh day on the Lhasa trail and, if the other ninety or more days before the pilgrims saw the mighty ramp and golden pinnacle of the Potala were equally full, no wonder they came back with the rapt look of Argonauts in eyes that had seen enough excitement and

adventure to last a lifetime. Small wonder too that the pilgrim tide of the land rose yearly toward that faraway place of gods, prostrations and prayer, to ebb again with the fulfillment of the dream of a lifetime.

XVIII

Farewell to Lhamo

The moon had dropped very near the western pass, and, as I came around the last bend in the valley, suddenly seemed to pause atop the long, low outline of our compound on the shoulder of the hill ahead of me. There were only three hundred yards more of trail but the big gray never changed that steady, shuffling gait with which in twenty hours he had brought me one hundred miles to stare, wondering anxiously, at the low outline of the wall. And as I stared, the moon that seemed to rest almost on the ridgepole of our house rippled oddly askew, like those in old Chinese prints. The sudden distortion brought a partial answer to my wondering, for the waves of heat and smoke from the pipe of our bedroom stove had pulled the round moon egg-shaped on top of the roof. That meant that the bedroom fire, tended by faithful servants, was still burning. It brought the first hope I had known since the moment eleven hours before, when Tibetan messengers had found me in the home of a nomad friend with news that Dorje Mtso was desperately ill of some strange sickness.

My host had sensed the import of that message before I did and rushed for my horse as the rest of the family cried out their concern. Then I began a sixty-mile ride on a horse that had already come forty miles that same day.

As I left, my host's sudden shout cut into my anxious thoughts. "The water ouzel has dipped under the bridge," he cried. "Look at the water ouzel flying by the stream—a water ouzel—a good omen. No need of fear, but ride fast on the good horse."

And, until I saw the smoke and heat waves across the face of the moon, the water ouzel had been the only sign of hope in an all-night ride. Early in the evening my men and I had ridden into a camp of traders by the trail and, shortly answering their challenges, had gone on. Soon after that my companions had dropped behind. They might not arrive for another whole day. I had hurried on alone and a thankful wonderment at the powers of the big gray flashed in my mind as he stopped at my gate and the gatekeeper came to unbar it. Dorje Mtso was still alive he told me; conscious, but very low. Undoubtedly she had the venom of the earth in her veins—that deadly poison that breathes from the earth and makes cattle, horses and men die. The gatekeeper would not mention the word, for that makes the power of the poison even more deadly. But I knew: *anthrax.*

In all the suspense and uncertainty of the days that followed no Tibetans rode through the gates to disturb—they have a very strict taboo against disturbing the sick—but day after day one sequence of events never failed. I

would stand outside the door of our living quarters and the gatekeeper would bring the gifts and say the roll of our friends. Duggur, Slab Face Rinchen, Tamba, Dongtro, Jamtso, Trinlan, even Jigmet, and many others from ten, fifteen and twenty miles away brought their offerings of friendship, for I was in trouble—Dorje Mtso was sick. They heard she drank broth, and fresh meat came in generous sections. They heard she drank milk, and buckets of milk were brought. Only Stretch Ears was not heard from, and one day the gatekeeper explained.

Stretch Ears was away now on official business but he had been at home for those few crucial hours when the need had arisen to send messengers looking for me. The trails had been robber-haunted. Numbers of robber clans were known to be abroad, a special fear was in the air, and no one would go at any price until Stretch Ears intervened. He had called in two of the monks and given them their choice—go as messengers or settle with him when he returned. They were to choose his friendship or his enmity and they had wisely chosen his friendship and the danger-shadowed trail that had brought them to me with the message.

Then one day a special delegation of monks—ecclesiastical leaders—came to talk with me in the guest room. For all their dignity, they were oddly ill at ease. They expressed their solicitude in lowered voices and finally arrived at the object of their visit. Much had been said, they explained, about some not liking us, and there had even been reports

that curses had been chanted against us. But it was not so. Now the lamasery monks wished to offer Dorje Mtso the benefit of an entire ceremonial chant to break the power of the poison of the earth. It was to be entirely a gift. We were to pay nothing—not even refreshments. But they first wished to ask if it were agreeable to us, for everyone knew that our religion was a different religion and maybe would allow no other prayers to be said. But at least they had come to show their hearts and, palms upturned, they waited for my reply.

They had been embarrassed, but now it was my turn, for I did not in the least wish to hurt their feelings. The kindliness of their offer deserved nothing less than gratitude and candor in my reply. I told them that they had shown us their hearts and we were deeply grateful. But for us who believed the Jesus religion, whether for life or death, only prayers to our God were any good. Would they give me one more kindness in all my trouble and not be angry?

They had expected it but wanted to show their good feeling. Relief showed on their faces as they wished us well, hoping that our God would answer our prayers when their prayers would not do. Yet that day of uncertainty was also the day of the crisis and many days later Dorje Mtso was to be moved down to the border out of the altitude that had played such havoc with heart and nerves. When the caravan started only our closest friends knew we were leaving and it seemed a strangely hurried farewell to Taktsang Lhamo.

But it was not my last farewell. Months later I spent two days in Lhamo, closing up our place and storing our things.

Stretch Ears, fresh from scouting and military operations against the Communist armies of Chu Teh and Mao Tze Tung, took two days off to help me in all my labors. The Communists were said to be barely two days' ride away. Though the Tibetans were rather successfully fighting them, and the climate and hardships of travel on the high steppe were even more successfully opposing their march, no one knew when the alarm of their coming might fly over the southern sky line. All day, as we packed and stored our stuff—some in Stretch Ears' place, some in Trinlan's place and some in our own house—our horses were kept close at hand, fully saddled. And all day Stretch Ears followed me like a shadow, saying little.

Finally the last thing had been done and although I was to spend one more wakeful night in Taktsang Lhamo there was at last time for talk. Across the supper table in his house I faced and presented Stretch Ears with a gift of satin brought from Lanchow. But he would have none of it—he was giving me a present for I was the one leaving on a long journey—until I told him a story.

When Dorje Mtso had feared she would not live, I said, she had told me to thank Jamtzen for sending messengers to find me and had expressed the wish that he have some of her dishes as a keepsake. But now she was getting well and some day, after we had visited our people far beyond the great sea, we would come back to Taktsang Lhamo. But in the meantime, here was the gift of satin.

As I told the tale his grim face worked and at the end,

suddenly, hard-boiled Stretch Ears Jamtzen—stoutest of brave sons in a land of brave sons—put his head on his hands and bawled like a child while the supper steamed and grew cold.

At last he could speak. "I am so glad Dorje Mtso is getting well," he said. "I and all your friends—Duggur, Rinchen and all the others—and when you have seen your people you must hurry back to Taktsang Lhamo, for you are our foreigner—you belong to Sechu."

Next day we rode away from Lhamo, half wondering whether the Communist armies would not spill over the passes as we rode. The Tibetans, grimly preparing to fight if they should come—fortunately they never did reach the Goddess of The Tiger's Den but took an easier route on that part of their famous march—had little time for farewells. But that tear-spattered speech from Stretch Ears—prince of orators and brave sons—was the true and lasting farewell that went with us as we traveled east and left Tibetan sky lines far behind.